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THE MORTAL AND DIVINE HISTORIES OF MONGÁN MAC FIACHNAI IN *CÍN DROMMA SNECHTAI*

ABSTRACT

It has long been claimed that Early Irish literature portrays a form of reembodiment which is the equivalent of Pythagorean *metempsychosis*. But this is not what we find in most examples. Where a human is said to have traversed multiple embodiments, the process of reembodiment generally comes to an end once the person in question has been restored to their proper form and bequeathed their memories of ancient history to the Church. However, some of the earliest stories about Mongán mac Fiachnai do not fit this pattern. *Immacaldam Choluim Cille* and *Scél asa mberar co mbad hé Find mac Cumail Mongán* offer no indication that Mongán's sequence of embodiments is drawing to an end, or which of his bodies may properly be his. This study will interpret the open-endedness of Mongán's rebirths, in these two instances, in light of related stories which have also been attributed to *Cín Dromma Snechtai*. Doing so will allow us to determine the degree to which Mongán's rebirths show parallels with Pythagorean *metempsychosis*, and the meaning these rebirths had for their medieval Christian context. Moreover, it will demonstrate further links between the tales that the current consensus places in *Cín Dromma Snechtai*.¹

Among the many fascinating features of Early Irish literature are its stories of souls traversing from body to body. Such stories are, of course, not confined to medieval Ireland. Many such are found in Classical poetry and philosophy, for example. This point of comparison has not been lost on scholarship. There has long been a tendency to equate the way that reembodiment is portrayed in Early Irish accounts with the Pythagorean doctrine of *metempsychosis* that Classical authors sometimes attributed to ancient Celtic-speaking peoples.² Some have gone on to claim that this ostensible correspondence demonstrates a

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the seventh annual colloquium on 'Thinking about Mythology in the 21st Century' at the University of Edinburgh on the 19th of October 2019. My thanks to John Carey (Cork) and Jonathan Wooding (Sydney), for offering such useful criticisms of that earlier version. These did much help guide the trajectory of its development into its present form. My thanks also to Elizabeth Boyle (Maynooth), to Evan King (UCD), and especially to Liam Breatnach (DIAS), for their patient and clarifying advice at various stages of that development. I owe a debt of gratitude to the anonymous reader as well, whose comments and criticisms pointed the way forward on multiple fronts. Any faults found here are, of course, to be blamed squarely on myself alone. At the outset, it should also be noted that this paper includes an appendix. In it are found the text and translation of quotations that, on account of their length, could not be included into the body of the relevant footnotes. Reference shall be made to the appropriate section of this appendix wherever a footnote cites one of the quotations in question.

² Diodorus Siculus straightforwardly attributed the Pythagorean doctrine of *metempsychosis* to the Gallic peoples as a whole; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* V.xxviii.6; Oldfather, ed. and trans. (1939–67, vol. iii: ed. 170 and trans. 171). Valerius Maximus said that the Gallic peoples had the same beliefs about the immortality of the soul as the Pythagoreans; *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium* II.x.6; Kempf, ed. (1854: 205). Ammianus Marcellinus said that Gallic druids had the same beliefs about the immortality of the soul as the Pythagoreans; *Rerum Gestarum Libri XXXI*, XV.ix.4; Rolfe, ed. and trans. (1950, vol. i: ed. 180 and trans. 181). Julius Caesar seems to have attributed Gallic druids a doctrine of *metempsychosis*, but did not compare this to Pythagoreanism; Caesar, *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* I.vi.14.5; Edwards, ed. and trans. (1917: ed. 338 and trans. 399). Ps. Hippolytus portrayed Gallic druids as Pythagoreans, but did not mention the doctrine of *metempsychosis* as one of his examples of this; *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* [a.k.a. *Philosophumena*] I.xxv.1; Litwa, ed. and trans., (2016: ed. 80 and trans. 81). Strabo attributes Gallic druids the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, but does not compare this to Pythagoreanism; *Geographica* IV.iv.4; Jones, ed. and trans. (1917–32,

continuity of belief between ancient Gallic druids and the medieval Irish learned classes, at least on this one issue.³ But the conclusion that the kind of reembodiment portrayed in Early Irish narratives is more or less the same as Pythagorean *metempsychosis* – and so also, as the doctrine attributed to Gallic druids in antiquity – has tended to be based only on the most tangential references to the ancient Pythagorean evidence.⁴ Whatever continuities these medieval sources may have with pre-Christian belief in Ireland, a closer comparison will reveal that they portray reembodiment in a way that has important, even fundamental, points of contrast with *metempsychosis*, as ancient Pythagoreans understood it.

However, the early stories about Mongán are found here to be a special case, perhaps even an exception: having a much higher degree of similarity to the ancient Pythagorean material, and displaying none of the concern for the implications of Christian eschatology which is otherwise typical. The task of working out how far this similarity goes, and of determining the meaning that such a singular process of reembodiment as Mongán's could have within a medieval Christian understanding of reality, will require that we read the relevant accounts in light of each other. The many parallels (and occasional overlaps) in the content of these stories would be reason enough for this interpretative approach, especially since four, out of the five principle texts in question, are often transmitted in the same manuscripts,⁵ and all have been dated to the eighth century, or somewhat earlier.⁶ Yet such an

vol. ii: ed. 244 and trans. 245); St. Clement of Alexandria, argues for the influence of Gallic druids [among other 'barbarian' philosophers] on Pythagoras and Greek philosophy in general; *Stromata* I.xv.70.1, 71.4; Stählin, ed. (1906–9, vol. i: 44–5); Ferguson, trans. (2005: 75–6). For translations of all these passages as a single collection of excerpts, see Koch and Carey *et al*, trans. (2003: 12–23, 30–6).

³ Here d'Arbois de Jubainville (1884: 344ff) is seminal. More recent examples include Carey's description of the relevant evidence in *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* in Carey (2000: 58 n. 7): 'This remarkable statement appears to indicate that, in the middle of the seventh century, there were still in Ireland druids [...] preaching some form of the doctrine of transmigration ascribed to their continental counterparts by Greek and Roman authors'. He has since modified his stance on this specific text in an encyclopedeia entry (2006a: 1484–6), where he continues to draw parallels to the Pythagorean tradition relative to other forms of Early Irish evidence, but without explicitly claiming their continuity with the ideas attributed to druids by Greek and Roman authors; a similar statement has since been made in Carey (2009: 221). However, in the same volume, other scholars stay closer to the earlier form of his argument; see Freeman (2006: 850): 'Pagan Celtic views about an afterlife as found in later Irish and Welsh literature are often a mixture of reincarnation and an otherworldly land of the dead [...] It is likely that some ancient Celts viewed an afterlife in an otherworld as a temporary state before reincarnation, similar to Plato's Pythagorean myth of Er (*Republic* 10)'.

⁴ Nutt (1895–7a) being the most notable exception.

⁵ These five texts are: 1) *Compert Mongáin*, 2) *Scél asa mberar co mbad hé Find mac Cumail Mongán ocus aní día fil aided Fothaid Airgidig*, 3) *Echtrae Chonnlae*, 4) *Immram Brain*, and 5) *Immacaldam Choluim Chille 7 ind Óclaig oc Carraic Eolairg*. There is a chart displaying these patterns of transmission in White (2006: 11). Texts 1 and 2 here are the first two in the sequence of four early Mongán tales that are generally transmitted as a group and in the same order. The outlier in this list is *Immacaldam Choluim Chille 7 ind Óclaig oc Carraic Eolairg* (the *Immacaldam*, hereafter). It is grouped with *Compert Mongáin* and *Scél Mongáin* in TCD MS H 3. 18 (1337) part 2, pp. 555–6, but none of these other texts are found in TCD H 2. 17 (1319), where it appears on p. 178. For further bibliographical information on the *Immacaldam*, see Carey (2002: 54).

⁶ As recently as Mac Mathúna (1985: 421–89), it has been argued that the constituent texts of *Cín Dromma Snechta* were no older than the tenth century. However, this conclusion has not stood up very well to subsequent

approach is made all the more necessary by the fact that the current scholarly consensus traces them to the same lost manuscript,⁷ namely *Cín Dromma Snechtai*,⁸ the earliest known collection of narratives written in the Irish vernacular, or for that matter, in any Western European vernacular.⁹ The crucial aspect of this consensus opinion, for the concerns at hand, is the conclusion that these specific texts appear not simply to have been collected and compiled by the northern scriptorium which produced *Cín Dromma Snechta*, but to variously reflect its creative and editorial activity.¹⁰ The process of clarifying the significance of Mongán's reembodyments by comparison with Pythagorean *metempsychosis* will thus have the additional significance of providing further confirmation of the accepted list of *Cín Dromma Snechta* texts. For through this process it will be demonstrated that, beyond the textual and thematic links which have previously been noted, these texts share a theologically and cosmologically coherent vision of Mongán, and of the earthly paradise to which he belongs.

PYTHAGOREAN *METEMPSYCHOSIS* AND EARLY IRISH REEMBODIMENT

In Classical antiquity, *metempsychosis*, where it is held as a doctrine, is invariably presented as an essential feature of the soul's metaphysical character, and as an argument for the justice of divine providence.¹¹ The sufferings which a rational being endures in a given embodiment are not unjust if they are neither more nor less than the education necessary to correct the vices that it acquired in its previous embodiments. However, in Early Irish

scrutiny. See Breatnach (1988: *passim*, but esp. 191); Carey (1995a: 72 n. 10); McCone (2000a: 43–7, 66–8). Although McCone (2000a: 67–8) has suggested that the name '*Cín Dromma Snechta*' could as easily belong to a tenth-century mediation of the original eighth-century archetype, as to the archetype itself. This possibility has subsequently been raised by White (2006: 36–7) and Stifter (2017: 24). The dating of these texts will be discussed on an individual basis as the argument makes reference to them.

⁷ For a list of the texts currently attributed to *Cín Dromma Snechtai*, see Carey (1995a: 71–2; 2007: 27–41); Stifter (2019b).

⁸ For an overview of the history of scholarship on *Cín Dromma Snechta* and its hypothesised contents, see Stifter (2017: 23 n. 2).

⁹ 'Western' because I would not be confident in claiming that it necessarily predates any such development in the vernacular literatures of Armenia or Georgia.

¹⁰ The most important discussion of the textual and thematic evidence is Carey (1995a: 73–5, 77–86, 91). His discussion here is subsequently summarised in Carey (2007: 28–9). White (2006: 37–70) expands on Carey's findings, and works out some of their implications for the interpretation of the relevant texts. In a recent article, Stifter (2017: 28–31) has since identified further thematic evidence which supports Carey's conclusions about their interrelationships, and in a subsequent lecture (2019a), further linguistic evidence.

¹¹ As slight as our knowledge of Pythagoreanism earlier than Plato is, the fragments of Empedocles suggest that this characterisation may also be consistent with pre-Platonic forms of Pythagoreanism. For a systematic account of Empedocles's understanding of *metempsychosis* in the context of his overall theology, see Rangos (2012). However, any distinction between pre- and post-Platonic Pythagoreanism is of little relevance to the case at hand. By the time of the earliest Classical authors which compare the Pythagorean *metempsychosis* to Gallic beliefs about the fate of the soul, Pythagoreanism had already become inseparable from its various post-Platonic interpretations.

literature, reembodiment does not occur as part of the general order of things (at least, not where humans are concerned),¹² but rather as an atypical interruption of the normal operation of natural processes.¹³

Where it is clearly humans that are portrayed as undergoing serial embodiments, it seems to occur only in exceptional cases, to notable people.¹⁴ This may, at first, make them appear difficult to distinguish from the relevant Pythagorean accounts, seeing as they also tend to base their exploration of these matters on exceptional cases and notable people: namely, on those few that are able to remember their past embodiments.¹⁵ In either instance, the matter of central importance is the authoritative knowledge that a clear memory of past embodiments is thought to grant to the person in question.¹⁶ But for the Pythagorean accounts,¹⁷ whatever historical information is made available through the experiences of past embodiments functions as little more than supporting evidence that such a person possesses authoritative knowledge concerning the rebirths that all souls are understood to undergo, and thus, concerning the soul itself.¹⁸ For the soul's rebirths, according to these ancient authors,

¹² It does indeed seem as it might be seen as natural occurrence for certain other kinds of beings. This possibility will be discussed on pp. 24 and 32.

¹³ On this issue, it seems to be only Diogenes Laertius's *Vitae Philosophorum* (c. 3rd cent. A.D.) that presents Pythagorean *metempsychosis* in a form that is comparable to the relevant medieval Irish material. According to him, 'the revolution' or 'wandering of the soul' (τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς περιπόλησιν / tēn tēs psukēs peripolēsīn) undergone by Pythagoras is a special 'gift' (δῶρον / dōron) given him by the god Hermes, rather than the universal fate of all souls; see *Vitae Philosophorum* VIII.4; Dorandi, ed. (2013: 602); translations here are mine. However, it appears not to be relevant to the case at hand. It does not agree with the Classical sources that compared the beliefs of Gallic druids about the post-mortem fate of souls to Pythagorean *metempsychosis*. Moreover, it is unlikely to have been available in Latin translation early enough to have been an influence on the seventh- and eighth-century sources we have been considering here, the earliest recorded attempt being the partial translation attributed to Henricus Aristippus († 1162), now surviving only in fragments; Dorandi (2013: 9–10).

¹⁴ Nutt (1895–7a: 120–1) went as far as this, but for the sake of trying to argue for strong parallels with more archaic forms of Greek thought instead. See also Mac Cana (1983: 122): 'Far from implying that a process of serial reincarnation affected all animate beings, the legends restrict it to a relatively small number of instances concerning either deities or mythical personages.' See also Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux (1986: 271–3, esp. 273): 'Il importe aussi de souligner que la métempsychose celtique n'est pas Générale, comme celle quia cours dans plusieurs religions de l'Inde'.

¹⁵ Noted by Carey (2006a: 1485; 2015: 65).

¹⁶ Although, in Classical literature, the idea of Pythagorean *metempsychosis* is sometimes turned to as a way as of establishing (or making sense of) the significance of a person who does not necessarily remember their past embodiments. For Ennius's claim that a dream revealed to him that he was a reincarnation of Homer, see discussion and references in Skutsch (1985: 147–67); Newman (1988: 434–6); Aicher (1989). For Antipater's claim that Stesichorus was a reincarnation of Homer, see *Anthologia Graeca* LXXIV; Gow and Page, eds and trans. (1968, vol. i: ed. 58 and trans. 59), with discussion in Newman (1988: 436) and Rawles (2018: 28ff.).

¹⁷ The classic example here is the Myth of Er in Book X of Plato's *Republic*; Slings, ed. (2003: 369–409); Grube and Reeve, trans. (1997: 1199–23). But see also the following. Iamblichus's *De vita Pythagorica* XIV; Deubner and Klein, eds (1975: 34–5); Clark, trans. (1989: 25–6). Porphyry, *De vita Pythagorae* XXVI; des Places, ed. and trans. (1982: 163–97, at 48); Guthrie, trans. (1987–8: 123–35, at 128).

¹⁸ i.e. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* XV, lines 479–879 appears to be innovative in presenting historical knowledge as a fundamental aspect of Pythagoras's wisdom, and thus also, not to be representative of what the Classical authors, cited in note 2, would have had in mind when attributing belief in Pythagorean *metempsychosis* to Celtic-speaking peoples; Miller, ed. and trans. (1984: ed. 398–426 and trans. 399–427). For discussion of this as

are not accidental adventures into which it has somehow fallen, but a process that belongs to its very nature as soul.¹⁹ Whereas, for the Early Irish accounts, the authoritative knowledge taken to be possessed by such a person is precisely that of a reliable witness to ancient history,²⁰ a historical knowledge which – however evocative it may be of other matters – is not claimed to reveal anything at all regarding the processes that are intrinsic to the soul as such.²¹ For in medieval Irish literature, it is not so much their memory of past embodiments that makes such people exceptional, as the fact that they were reembodied at all, this evidently being due to otherworldly involvement²² or some more explicitly divine miracle.²³

Moreover, every such account ends, to my knowledge, with the protagonist regaining their own natural human form, after which they meet one of the saints, and subsequently die a death that is absolute and final.²⁴ In this way they avoid any of the awkward dilemmas about

an innovation, see Hardie (1995: 210–12); Segal (2001: 81, incl. n. 42). It is also unlikely to have directly influenced the medieval Irish texts we are considering here, since the earliest extant example of extended commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the Latin West is that of Manegold of Lautenbach, and belongs to the last quarter of the eleventh century; Dronke (2008: 90–5); Dronke (2009: 21).

¹⁹ For Platonic forms of Pythagoreanism, this characteristic of the rational soul is something that it has in distinction it from other kinds of beings that are inferior (animals) and superior (divinities) to it, even if the reembodiments of rational souls can include animal reembodiment according to some manner that is particular to their rational nature. On this, see Smith (1984). However, according to more materialist interpretations of Pythagoreanism – such as we find summarised by Sextus Empiricus – *metempsychosis* demonstrates that divinities, humans and animals are different modes of existence which the soul undergoes, rather than essentially different kinds of being, life and thought. Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* IX [a.k.a. *Adversus Physicos*] i.127; Bury, ed. (1933–49, vol. iii: 2–381, at 68); Bett, trans. (2012: 28).

²⁰ See a similar statement in Carey (2006: 1486): 'In most of the insular examples, memory of former existences is invoked to provide authority for accounts of the distant past'. The reason I make a somewhat stronger claim is that I am characterising a smaller group of examples than Carey is here: i.e. those which include (or seem to include) actual rebirth, rather than all transitions from one embodiment to another.

²¹ Accepting Bondarenko's argument that the significance of the *senchas* preserved by Fintan mac Bóchra extends to the interpretation of contemporary institutions perceived to be ancient, in the broadest sense, but rejecting his contention that this somehow makes it distinct from the medieval discipline of *historia*; Bondarenko (2012: 142).

²² With the proviso that the relevant examples tend more towards *metamorphosis* than rebirth. See Watson (forthcoming). One might easily suppose that Mongán mac Fiachnai is the prime example of rebirth that is due to otherworldly involvement. See, for instance, *Immram Brain* §53–4 [McCone (2005) / White (2006) §4–5] in note 55. However, we shall find that it is by no means certain that he is understood to have an essentially human identity. On this, see pages 20ff. below.

²³ In the case of Tuán mac Cairill, divine agency is first explicitly referenced relative to his last two reembodiments: a salmon, and then a human again; *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill*, lines 63–4, 67; Carey, ed. and trans. (1984: ed. 102 and trans. 106): 'Domchuirethar Dia isin n-abaind [...] in tan rumba mithig la Dia mo chobair sea' (= God puts me into the river [...] When God decided that it was time to help me). This seems to imply the decisive role of divine agency from the beginning of the process of reembodiment. It is, in any event, how it was later understood in material belonging to R² and R³ [esp. The Book of Ballymote and The Book of Lecan, second text] of the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*; see *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* §222, 236 [prose] and XXXIX.1 [poetry]; Macalister, ed. and trans. (1938–56, vol. iii: ed. 22, 41, 80 and trans. 23, 42, 81). Albeit, the matter is likely worthy of a more detailed consideration than is possible here. The case of Fintan mac Bóchra, however, is less ambiguous; divine agency is explicitly manifest from the beginning; *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §9; Best, ed. and trans. (1910: ed. 130 and trans. 131): 'Mad misi romanacht / mac Dé' (= As for me I was saved / by the Son of God).

²⁴ In *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill*, lines 7–12, 75ff. Tuán's final reembodiment does not end before St. Patrick catechises and baptizes him, Sts. Finnia and Colum Cille also speak to him, and he has become a hermit; see

the resurrection body which would necessarily follow were all of a soul's embodiments to be on equal footing, to say nothing of the additional complications that would result if some of these equally legitimate embodiments were non-human. If it is the unity of the body and soul together that is thought to make up a complete human identity (rather than the soul alone), and the body in which a soul is born is thought to be the one that is necessarily proper to it, then the identity of the body in which a soul will rise at the Last Judgement becomes a far from indifferent matter.²⁵ And were that soul not, at some point, to undergo a bodily death which no rebirth follows, there could be no such thing as a Last Judgement so far as that soul is concerned. For the effect of any post-mortem judgement undergone by a soul which is always yet to be reembodied again will necessarily be provisional, extending only through the next cycle of embodiment to whatever judgement will, in turn, come after.²⁶ Or such, at least, was St. Augustine's influential conclusion on the subject.

Of the relevant examples, Tuán mac Cairill comes as close as any to a Pythagorean doctrine of *metempsychosis* insofar as at least one of his reembodiments (i.e. his transition from a salmon to a human) seems to clearly involve death as a feature of the transition from one bodily form to another, even if there is still physical continuity between his soon-to-be

Carey, ed. and trans. (1984: ed. 101–2 and trans. 105–7). For Carey's linguistic dating of *Scél Tuáin* to the second half of the ninth century, and its connexions with other texts, see (1984: 93–100). In the Middle Irish text, *Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, Fintan mac Bóchra's final reembodiment ends only after receiving the sacrament from the hand of bishop Erc, and the spirits of Sts. Patrick and Brigid are present at his death; *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §36; Best, ed. and trans. (1910: ed. 160 and trans. 161). Lí Ban, in *Aided Echach maic Maireada*, is a somewhat different case, since it is clear that her initial body is not exchanged for another at any point, but is, rather, transformed; O'Grady, ed. and trans. (1892, ed. vol. i: 233–7 and trans. vol. ii: 265–9); de Vries, ed. and trans. (2012: ed. 200–18 and trans. 201–19). This story has been most recently dated to the twelfth century by de Vries (2012: 23). Her alternation of form, as described by *Aided Echach*, is also recounted in detail by the Middle Irish commentary on *Félire Óengusso* §27; Stokes, ed. and trans. (1905: ed. 52 and trans. 53). It is further alluded to in the Cottonian Annals. See Freeman, ed. and trans. (1924–7, ed. vol. i: 321 and trans. vol. iii: 362). In the *Annals of Tigernach*, however, it is Lí Ban's sister, Airiu, who changes form; Stokes, ed. and trans. (1895–7, vol. ii: 147). For further discussion and notes, see Imhoff (2008).

²⁵ On the reunification of soul and body at the Resurrection, and the reconstitution, preservation and perfection of the particulars that are unique to one's own body in that state, see St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (*DCD*, hereafter XXII.4–5 and 11ff; Dombart and Kalb, eds (1955, vol. ii: 557–61 and 584ff.); Bettenson, trans. (1972: 1026–7 and 1049ff.). In the context of medieval Irish literature, the most transparent engagement with Augustine's thought on this issue is likely the eleventh- or twelfth-century text, *Scéla na Esérgei*. For its distinction of resurrection (*esérgei*) from such things as *metamorphosis* (*metaformatio*) and *metempsychosis* (*revolutio*), see *Scéla na Esérgei* §33; Stokes, ed. and trans. (1904: ed. 250 and trans. 251). Carey notes (2015: 64) that this passage shows the influence of Augustine. For further discussion of this aspect of *Scéla na Esérgei*, see Boyle (2014: 249–51). However, the date of this text means that the light it sheds on Early Irish engagement with this aspect of *DCD* is limited, for the most part, to the narratives about Fintan mac Bochra and Lí Ban referenced in note 24.

²⁶ Augustine's primary criticism of *metempsychosis*, as he understands it, is that, if the soul is always being reembodied, even the most beatific life in heaven cannot be truly happy. For the happiness of a beatified soul would necessarily be blighted by the fearful anticipation of the unavoidable fall that is yet to come, in which it will be plunged back again into the suffering which characterises inferior embodiments; *DCD* X.30, XXI.17; Dombart and Kalb, eds (1955, vol. i: 307–8; vol. ii: 783); Bettenson, trans. (1972: 418–9, 995).

mother's digestion of his fish-flesh and her subsequent conception of him in her womb.²⁷ However, his sequence of reembodiments comes to a definitive end once he, with his human body restored to him, has met the saints of Ireland, and bequeathed to them his knowledge of the past ages.²⁸ His recovered humanity is the *dúnad* which signals the end of his life.²⁹ As such, there is, in the end, no ambiguity as to which body is truly his; it is the human form in which he was twice born and once baptised.³⁰

THE AMBIGUITY OF MONGÁN

But very little of this seems to apply to the Old Irish accounts of Mongán mac Fiachna. One of the most important of these for our concerns is the cumbersomely named *Scél asa mberar co mbad hé Find mac Cumail Mongán ocus aní día fil aided Fothaid Airgdig*³¹ (the *Scél*, hereafter). In the *Scél*, then, it is not at all clear which bodily form is intrinsic to Mongán. As

²⁷ *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill*, lines 69–71; Carey, ed. and trans. (1984: ed. 102 and trans. 106): ‘Cuman lim dano co ndombeir in fer 7 fomnoí, 7 nom ithend in ben a oenur co mbá in a broind. Cuman lim dano ind airt ro mbá ina broind 7rl.’ (= I remember then how the man takes me and cooks me, and the woman also eats me so that I was in her womb. I remember then the interval when I was in her womb, etc.). While it seems unlikely to have been an influence on medieval Irish developments, the central role that ingestion was thought to play in the transition from one form of embodiment to another (or, indeed, in being freed from the cycle of reembodiment), in Manichaeism, is worth noting; e.g. Augustine, *De haeresibus* XLVI.13; *PL* 42, col.37; Gardner and Lieu, trans. (2004: 190): ‘Sic quippe in omnem carnem, id est, per escas et potus venire animas credunt’ (= For this is the way, indeed, they [the Manichees] believe that souls come into all flesh, that is, through food and drink). Comparable examples inception by ingestion may be found in the following. *Tochmarc Étaíne* I.21; Bergin and Best, eds and trans. (1938: ed. 156 and trans. 157). *De Chopur in Dá Muccida*; Best, Bergin and O’Sullivan, eds (1954–83, vol. v: 1121–4, at 1122, lines 32989–92); Kinsella, trans. (1969: 46–50, at 49–50). *Compt Con Culainn* §6-8; van Hamel, ed. (1933: 5.1–6.8); Gantz, trans. (1981a: 132–3). However, the first two of these examples concern the rebirths of otherworld immortals rather than humans, and if Cú Chulainn’s birth is a reembodiment, it is not self-evident. He is at any rate, not a reembodiment of his immortal father, Lug, as Bondarenko (2013: 140–2) has claimed, since Lug is consistently portrayed as being a distinct being whose existence overlaps with that of Cú Chulainn.

²⁸ *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill*, lines 78–81; Carey, ed. and trans. (1984: ed. 102 and trans. 107): ‘Anait sechtmain i ssuidiu oc imacallaim. Nach senchas 7 nach genelach fil i nHéire is ó Thuán nac Cairill a bunadus. Attaglastar Pátraic ri sin 7 atcuaid dó 7 attaglastar Colum Cille 7 atcuaid Finnia dó i fiadnaisi lochta in tíre’ (= They [Finnia and his followers] remain there for a week conversing [with Túan]. Whatever history and genealogy there is in Ireland, its origin is from Tuán son of Cairell. Patrick had spoken with him before that, and he related it to him; and Colum Cille had spoken with him; and Finnia related it to him in the presence of the folk of the land).

²⁹ Murphy (1961: 43): ‘In Irish syllabic verse, and also often in the older poetry, the last word or syllable of the *íarcomarc* (final stanza) echoes the first word or syllable of the first line of the poem.’

³⁰ It is worth noting that this would not answer every early Christian theologian’s concerns about the idea that a rational soul could be reembodied. For those who had a Stoic materialist understanding of the soul (as opposed to a Platonic understanding of it as incorporeal), the possibility of a soul preserving what is distinct to it in a body other than the one that is proper to it would likely have been deemed impossible. This is, at any rate, certainly what we find in Lactantius, *Institutiones Divinae* III.18–19; Brandt and Laubmann, eds (1890–93, vol. i: 236–45); Bowen and Garnsey, trans. (2003: 202–7). On the Lactantius’s debts to Stoicism in his understanding of the soul, and further references, see (Colish 1990: 43) My thanks to the anonymous reader for drawing my attention to this reference.

³¹ i.e. ‘A story from which it is inferred that Mongán was Find mac Cumail and the cause of the death of Fothad Airgtech’.

the title of the story suggests, Mongán is discovered to be Find, such that an ancient friend of Find's, upon meeting Mongán, does not say that he *was* Find, but greets him *as* Find.³² The situation it describes is not, of course, without certain parallels to the later developments we have been discussing. Like Tuán mac Cairill,³³ he seems to enjoy a continuity of memory between past and present embodiments.³⁴ The story tells us: 'Mongán was Find except that he did not allow it to be told',³⁵ thus implying that Mongán was fully conscious of his preceding life as Find. Moreover, Mongán and Find are certainly exceptional individuals: as recurring figures in Early Irish literature, as uniquely gifted persons at the upper reaches of the political hierarchies to which they belong, and as humans who are, furthermore, associated with the divinities of the otherworld of the sagas.³⁶ We have seen that a focus on the reembodiments of similarly exceptional individuals is also typical of the Pythagorean sources.³⁷ But in distinction from them, the fact of Mongán's traversal from one embodiment to the next seems to be part of what makes him exceptional, rather than a process which, in being remembered, he is found to undergo in common with all other souls. The concern is, again, not what such a process of reembodiment may have revealed to the one who has undergone it regarding the nature of the soul itself, but the unique knowledge of ancient history that the memory of these reembodiments made possible for them: in this case, the knowledge of the place and cause of Fothad Airgtech's death.³⁸ Therefore, like the examples we have been considering to this point, the *Scél* seems to be a long way from presenting Find's rebirth as Mongán as emblematic of any cosmic process thought to apply to all souls generally.

In this respect, the parallels with the stories of Tuán mac Cairill, Fintan mac Bóchra, and the like are fairly strong. However, the *Scél* still differs from them radically in providing no way of knowing which embodiment – whether that of Find, Mongán, or someone else entirely – is the protagonist's proper bodily form, or if (from its perspective) there is indeed such a thing as a proper bodily form for Mongán. It remains at least hypothetically possible that Find is understood to be the 'true' bodily form of the person temporarily embodied in the

³² *Scél asa mberar co mbad hé Find mac Cumail Mongán ocus aní dia fíl aided Fothaid Airgdig* (the *Scél*, hereafter) §12; White, ed. and trans. (2006, ed. 73–4, at 74 and trans. 79–81, at 81): 'Bámar-ni lat su, la Find' (= We were with you Find).

³³ See note 27–8.

³⁴ Cf. *Tochmarc Étaíne*, where Étaín does not remember her identity prior to her embodiment as the daughter of Étar's wife; Bergin and Best, eds (1938: 170); Koch and Carey *et al*, trans. (2003: 146–65, at 155–6). This has been previously noted by Carey (2006a: 1485).

³⁵ The *Scél* §15; White, ed. and trans. (2006: ed. 73–4, at 74 and trans. 79–81, at 81): 'Ba hé Find [...] inti Mongán acht nand-léic a forndissiu'.

³⁶ For discussion of what is signified by 'divinity' in such cases, see pp. 29–34.

³⁷ Referring back to the discussion on pp. 3–5.

³⁸ The *Scél* §1–4, 11–15; White, ed. and trans. (2006: ed. 73–4 and trans. 79–81).

form of Mongán, or that this Mongán could be a restoration of a true form that preexisted his embodiment as Find, or, perhaps, that both are identical in form, seeing as his old friend, Caílte, is apparently able to recognize him immediately, without any sign on Mongán's part.³⁹ If so, the *Scél*'s presentation of Mongán would still be at least potentially conciliable with more standard Christian ideas about the resurrection body, seeing as this would remove any confusion regarding which body would be properly resurrected as his when the time came. However, if the author does in fact assume that the protagonist has a body that is proper to him, they seem to show no particular interest in making it clear.

Nevertheless, not every early story about Mongán's reembodiments offers so little information of relevance to a more standard medieval understanding of the doctrine of the Resurrection. Mannanán mac Lir's prophecy concerning Mongán in *Immram Brain*⁴⁰ seems to envisage him as being born a human, and then, despite many alternations of bodily form, dying in that same human form at the age of fifty, all without any indication of further embodiments preceding this birth or succeeding this death.⁴¹ Granted, it provides no indication of his baptism, or that he meets Christian saints, such as the tales of Tuán or Fintan might lead us to expect.⁴² However, his theological significance is made intelligible in another way: namely, through the typological connexion that the *Immram* traces between his identity as both god and man (the divinity, Manannán mac Lir, being his father) and that of Christ, as both God and man in the most absolute sense.⁴³ This is not to insist that the idea of

³⁹ See note 32.

⁴⁰ On the dating of this text, see note 70. On its contemporaneity with the four early Mongan tales, see pp.11–12 and 20–22 below.

⁴¹ *Immram Brain* §49–59 [McCone (2005) / White (2006) §1–10]; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 25–9 and trans. 24–8); McCone, ed. (2005: 145–6); White, ed. and trans. (2006: ed. 38–40 and trans. 39–41).

⁴² [Tuán mac Cairill]: *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill*, lines 75–6; Carey, ed. and trans. (1984: ed. 102 and trans. 106): 'Co tánic iarom Pátraic co creitem. Aes már dam i ssuidiu 7 rom báisted 7 ro creates im oenur Ríg na n-uili cona dúilib' (= After that Patrick came with the Faith. I was very old then, and I was baptised, and of my own accord I accepted belief in the King of All, with His creatures). [Fintan mac Bóchra]: *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §36; Best, ed. and trans. (1910: ed. 160 and trans. 161): 'Roforbastair tra Fintan a beathaid 7 saégul fon indus sin, 7 dofarraid aithrighi 7 rochaith comaind 7 sacarbaigg do láim epscuip Erc meic Ochomoin meic Fidhaich, 7 dodechaid spirat Pátraic 7 Brigde co rabatar a fiadnaisi a éitsechta' (= So Fintan ended his life and his age in this manner, and he came to repentance, and he partook of communion and sacrifice from the hand of bishop Erc son of Ochomon son of Fidach, and the spirits of Patrick and Brigit came and were present at his death).

⁴³ Carney's (1955: 280) identification of this typological connexion is seminal. While the correct interpretation of this typological connexion remains controversial, its identification as such, has not even, to my knowledge, been seriously disputed. For discussion, see (Mac Cana: 1975: 51); Carney (1976: 89); McCone (2000: 18, 157); White (2006: 45); Wooding (2009: 70); Stifter (2017: 29). Notable among these is Williams (2016: 66–8). While Williams takes the typological connexion between Mongán and Christ to be 'clearly deliberate' he, nevertheless, remains skeptical that Manannán could succeed in the role he was given as 'a "type" of God himself'. His reservations appear to arise from a sense that Manannán's sexual role in the procreation of Mongán undermines, even as it suggests, this typological connexion. However, Augustine's ideas on Edenic sexuality seem to provide the basis for beginning to resolve these apparent dissonances. For Augustine's ideas on Edenic sexuality, see note 96.

Mongán's divine parentage was necessarily derived from the Gospel story. But whatever its ultimate origins might be, the author of the *Immram* requires that we interpret his birth in light of Christ's, as its lesser likeness, by making a prophecy of the Christ's birth the context from which the prophecy of Mongán's birth emerges.⁴⁴ As for his baptism, it is likely to have simply been assumed, seeing as the annals have his life as a prince of Dál nAraide ending in 625 A.D.⁴⁵ Thus far, the *Immram* remains relatively uncontroversial in its expression, at least, insofar as the doctrine of the Resurrection is concerned.

The nameless youth of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille 7 ind Óclaig oc Carraic Eolairg*,⁴⁶ (the *Immacaldam*, hereafter) is another matter.⁴⁷ It is, to my knowledge, the one early instance where we have a saint (i.e. Colum Cille) speaking with someone whom at least some early Irish readers identified as Mongán.⁴⁸ As above, insofar as he is identified with Mongán, and Mongán is thought to be an early seventh-century ruler, it is not really very significant that the saint neither baptizes him, nor offers baptism.⁴⁹ What *is* significant is that there is no sign of his encounter with the saint bringing about (or else heralding) the final end of his life (a life which apparently goes farther back than the initial formation of Loch Febail), or even the final end of his sequence of reembodiments. Mongán (for those who identified him as such) simply disappears following his conversation with Colum Cille, leaving no clues regarding the character of his future. Nor does the narrator offer any indication of his true form, or that any end to the rebirths he has been speaking of is in

⁴⁴ Note also that, like Christ, Mongán will be accepted by the mortal husband of his mother. See Matt. 1:18ff. and *Immram Brain* §48–51; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 23–5 and trans. 22–4). Compare to the Cú Chulainn of *Brisleach Mór Maige Muirthemni* [BMMM, hereafter]; Kimpton, ed. and trans. (2009). On the Christ-typology of Cú Chulainn in BMMM, see Kelleher (1971: 121–2); McCone (2000: 197); Kimpton (2009: 4–5).

⁴⁵ Mongán is often portrayed as a ruler in the saga literature, but, according to the Annals, never succeeded his father, Fiachna, in the kingship of Ulster (or, according to some sources, the high-kingship of Tara), given that they have his death preceding Fiachna's. For discussion and references, see White (2006: 62–9). In which case, he is, for them, high in the hierarchy of rulers, but not supreme. This makes the question of why the sagas tend to portray him as a representative of ideal kingship all the more interesting (cf. the unambiguously lofty status of Conaire Mór, Cormac mac Airt, Conchobar, etc.).

⁴⁶ Initially, Carey (1995a: 77–80, 91) dated this text to the seventh century. However, in his subsequent edition of the text (2002: 53) he found it 'difficult to be confident' that it was any earlier than the eighth century. For a recent treatment, see Johnston (2015).

⁴⁷ Carey, ed. and trans. (2002: ed. 60 and trans. 61).

⁴⁸ This is with reference to its subtitle; *Immacaldam Choluim Chille 7 ind Óclaig oc Carraic Eolairg* [the *Immacaldam*, hereafter], lines 1–2; Carey, ed. and trans. (2002: ed. 60 and trans. 61): 'as-berat alaili bad é Mongán mac Fiachnai' (= some say that he was Mongán mac Fiachnai). Note that while the attribution is put forward as one interpretation among others here, his identification as Mongán is assumed by a later poem attributed to him in MS Laud 615; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 88–89 and trans. 89–90), and by Magnus Ó Domhnaill's Early Modern Irish *vita* of Colum Cille; *Beatha Colaim Chille* §87, 159; O'Kelleher and Schoepperle, eds and trans. (1918: ed. 78–82, 166–70 and trans. 79–83, 167–71).

⁴⁹ Cf. Carey (2011: 10), where Tuán's baptism is used as a means of distinguishing between the meaning of his encounter with the saint, and that of the nameless youth with Colum Cille. Cf. also Mac Cana (1975: 41–2).

sight.⁵⁰ But the *Scél* seems to push the *aporia* represented by Mongán even farther than this, so that not only the identity of his true body, but even the identity of the person that is undergoing the reembodiments has become unclear. Is Find a prior embodiment of Mongán, Mongán a subsequent embodiment of Find, or are they both subsequent embodiments of an identity which is fundamentally prior to, and distinct from, both of them? Is Mongán the last incarnation of this identity, or are there many more to come? It seems to provide no answer.

The question, then, is what we are to make of these apparently contrasting portrayals. The simplest approach would be to interpret the portrayal of Mongán in *Immram Brain* as in fundamental contrast with these latter examples, were it not that the current consensus traces the extant versions of these stories back the same manuscript, the lost *Cín Dromma Snechtai*.⁵¹ This would not necessarily be of any great relevance for our interpretation if it amounted to no more than an argument that they were once present together in a single volume. However, this is not the case. As it stands, the scholarship indicates that *Immram Brain* and the four early stories about Mongán, including the *Scél*, were all produced in the same northern scriptorium⁵² (that of Druimm Snechtai or that of Bangor),⁵³ and that their collective production was based, in part, on the *Immacaldam*, if the *Immacaldam* was not in fact produced together with them.⁵⁴ This raises the possibility that the decisive limits to Mongán's

⁵⁰ The *Immacaldam*, lines 24–7; Carey, ed. and trans. (2002: ed. 60 and trans. 61): ‘Óro bátar isin chobrunn, leth lai nó ó oentráth co raile, muintir Choluim Chille oca ndéicsi di etarchéin. Óro glé, co n-accatar talmaidiu do-celar erru ind óclach. Ní fetatar cia luid nó can to-luid’ (= They were conversing [?] for half the day, from one day to the next, as Colum Cille’s followers watched them from a distance. When [the conversation] ended, they suddenly saw that the youth was hidden from them. They did not know whither he went nor whence he came).

⁵¹ Carey (1995a: *passim*, but esp. 71–2; 2007: 27–41, esp. 35ff.); White (2006: 35–7, 41, 46–7); Stifter (2007: 27–31).

⁵² Mac Cana (1972; 1978: 85, 88); Carey (1995a: *passim*, but esp. 83 and 91; 2007: 28–9); White (2006: 45–6, 54); Murray (2017: 87); Stifter (2017).

⁵³ For the argument that the *Cín Dromma Snechtai* was composed at Druimm Snechtai, see Carey (2007: 29, 35–40). For the argument it was composed at Bangor, and only later became associated with Druimm Snechtai, see Mac Cana (1972: 103–6); Byrne (2005: 678); Stifter (2017: 24–6). For the history of the dating of *Cín Dromma Snechtai* and the conclusion that it was assembled in the eighth century, see Carey (1995a: 27 n. 10; 2007: 27, incl. n. 3). Further arguments in support of an eighth-century date for *Cín Dromma Snechtai* are made in White (2006: 35–7). McCone argues that while these texts do indeed have an eighth-century archetype, it is still at least possible that *Cín Dromma Snechtai* may have been a tenth-century mediation of that archetype; McCone (2000a: 67–8).

⁵⁴ Carey (1995a: *passim*, but esp. 91) has argued that *Echtrae Chonnlaí* and the *Immacaldam*, are among the texts which formed the basis for composition of *Immram Brain* and the Mongán tales. In a later paper (2002: 53) he amends this somewhat. Given that he is no longer confident that the *Immacaldam* is earlier than the eighth century, he then concludes that this may turn out to have implications for his earlier characterisation of these texts’ relationships, but does not discuss what these implications may be. White (2006: 41, 46, 56–7) cautiously noted that this might imply that the *Immacaldam* was produced together with *Immram Brain* and the Old Irish Mongán tales, rather than preexisting them as one of their sources, while also noting the plausibility of Carey’s construction of their relationships. More recently Carey (2007: 27–40) has placed it in the ‘Northern Group’ of texts, which, together with the ‘Midland Group’, are drawn upon by the later ‘Mixed Group’ of texts to which *Immram Brain* and the Mongán stories belong. This treatment seems to amount to a refinement of his previous theory rather than a new direction. This conclusion has since been adopted by Stifter (2017: 2019a; 2019b).

process of reembodiment, which *Immram Brain* seemed to establish, should be interpreted in light of the relevant elements of the *Immacaldam* and the *Scél*. In which case, the absolute birth and death of Mongán, which we seem to find in *Immram Brain* (when considered on its own), would threaten to become no more than the birth and death of the Mongán-centric⁵⁵ embodiment which has most recently been undergone by a being of uncertain identity, age, intrinsic character, and end.

THE DEATHLESS EARTHLY PARADISE

But before we go farther with this interpretation, we should perhaps consider the fate of Fintan mac Bóchra – as recounted in the Middle Irish text, *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* (the *Suidigud*, hereafter) – to determine if it is relevant for the case at hand. It suggests that Fintan, following his many different reembodiments, may not actually be dead, but that, if alive, is waiting in paradise (*pardus*) with Enoch and Elijah for the resurrection of the last day.⁵⁶ We must take care here not to confuse this paradise with the state that is said to await the righteous *following* the Resurrection (*eiséirgi*). As in Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses*,⁵⁷ among

⁵⁵ Mongán-centric, because it is said that he will be embodied as many different things between his birth and death as Mongán. *Immram Brain* §53–4 and 58 [McCone (2005) / White (2006) §4–5 and 9]; McCone, ed. (2005: 145–6); White, trans. (2006: 39–41): ‘4. Bieid i fethol cech míl / Etir glasmuir ocus tír; / Bid drauc re mbuidnib i froiss, / Bid cú allaid cech indroiss. / 5. Bid dam co mbennaib arcait / I mruig i:n-agtar carpait. / Bid écne brece i llind lán / Bid rón, bid elae findbán [...] 9. Bieid bes ngairit a ré / Coicait mblédne i mbith ché / Oirthei ail’ (= 4. He will be in the shape of every animal / Between blue-grey sea and land; / He will be a dragon before bands in a shower, / He will be a wolf of every great forest. / 5. He will be an ox with horns of silver / In a land in(to) which chariots are driven. / He will be a speckled salmon in a full lake / He will be a seal, he will be a pure white swan [...] 9. It shall be that his time will be short, / Fifty years in this world / A rock slays him).

⁵⁶ *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* [the *Suidigud*, hereafter] §36; Best, ed. (1910: 160–1); Nagy, trans. (1997: 6): ‘Is indemín immorro cí baile in rohadhnocht, acht is dóig leo is ina chorp chollaigi rucad i nnach ndíamair ndíada amail rucad Ele 7 Enócc i pardus condafil ic ernaidi eiséirgi in sruthseanóir sáeghlach sin .i. Fintan mac Bóchra’ (= It is uncertain, moreover, where he was buried, but they suppose that he was taken up in his fleshly body, by some divine mystery, just as Elijah and Enoch were taken, into paradise, where that long-lived ancient, Fintan mac Bochra awaits the Resurrection [edited]). The first ‘eis’ of ‘eiseiséirgi’ in YBL 109a [col. 749], lines 16–7, is not present in the Book of Lismore 134rb, line 31. Moreover, the first ‘eis’ occurs at the end of a line, with ‘eiséirgi’ following on the next, suggesting a mistaken scribal doubling of ‘eis’. Furthermore, if accepted, the doubled ‘eis’ would result in a word that is not otherwise attested. Therefore, I have replaced Best’s reading of ‘eiseiséirgi’ with ‘eiséirgi’. I have also replaced Nagy’s translation of this term (i.e. ‘rising’), with ‘resurrection’ for the sake of theological clarity. Additionally, by amending the translation of ‘i nnach ndíamair ndíada’ from ‘in a divine secret place’ to ‘by some divine mystery’, the meaning of the text in YBL is at once clarified and brought into accord with the text of the Book of Lismore 134rb, lines 29–31, where he is clearly understood to be in paradise: ‘co fil i parrtus’ (= so that he is in paradise). My thanks to Liam Breatnach for his decisive advice on how to resolve the ambiguities represented by Best’s text.

⁵⁷ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, V.v.1; see Appendix 1 for text and translation. Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, I.iii is another important example; see Appendix 2 for text and translation. See also Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali*, II.xxvii; PL 44, col. 397–8; Holmes, trans. (1886–9b: 246).

many other places,⁵⁸ this is a paradise of a preliminary sort. In the *Suidigud* this is demonstrated by the fact that it is the sort of place in which one anticipates rather than enjoys the consummation of all things taken to follow upon the Resurrection. Thus its inhabitants are, to use Irenaeus's words, everliving *coausicantes incorruptelam* (that is, 'presages' or 'tokens of imperishableness'), rather than immortals in the strictest sense of the word.⁵⁹ The same doctrine is given a much more expansive articulation in *Dá Brón Flatha Nime* 'The Two Sorrows of Heaven',⁶⁰ a Middle Irish text which has been dated to the late tenth or early eleventh century.⁶¹ Perhaps, then, something similar is thought to be the case with Mongán: the open-endedness surrounding his absolute death (if not his absolute bodily form) is portrayed as unresolved because, like the openendedness of the lives of Biblical prophets who have escaped death in their own way,⁶² it will only be brought to a close at the end of the

⁵⁸ For further ancient and medieval sources on the idea of a pre-resurrection paradise as an interim state for the disembodied souls of the righteous, sometimes for Enoch and Elijah, and occasionally others besides, see Delumeau (2000); Kabir (2004). Dumville (1976: 79, incl. notes) draws attention to the significance of apocryphal texts generally, and the *Visio Sancti Pauli* specifically, for Early Irish portrayals of a pre-resurrection paradise. Even so, the *Visio*'s influence on the development of this idea in medieval Ireland is far from uncomplicated, something which deserves detailed consideration on another occasion. The *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* is just one significant example of this. The *Navigatio* is the first of many medieval Irish texts to use the *Visio*'s term 'terra repromissionis' [i.e. the Land of Promise] to describe such a paradise; Dumville (1976: 79ff.); Carey (2015: 55). However, at the same time as the *Navigatio*'s depiction of the *terra repromissionis* clearly owes much to the *Visio*, it also diverges from it on relatively fundamental issues of the character of its inhabitants: i.e. it includes at least one person [a nameless youth] who is physically embodied. See *Visio Sancti Pauli* [St. Gall] §19–30; Silverstein and Hilhorst, eds (1997: 135–41); Elliott, trans. (1993: 616–44, at 627–33). Compare *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* §28; Orlandi and Guglielmetti, eds (2014: 109–11); O'Meara, trans. (1978: 67–9). For further discussion of the *Visio*'s influence on the *Navigatio*, see McNamara (2006) and Carey (2017; 2020: 167).

⁵⁹ Given that the sojourn of such beings involves awaiting and then successively experiencing certain temporal events (i.e. martyrdom at the hands of the Antichrist, the Resurrection and the Day of Judgement), they cannot be said to be eternal (transcendent of time itself), or even to enjoy whatever state of second-order timelessness (intermediate between temporality and eternity) might be said to characterise the experience of the resurrected saints in heaven.

⁶⁰ Carey, ed. and trans. (2019a). See also parallel material in *Fís Adamnáin* §60–62; Carey, ed. and trans. (2019b: ed. 111–13 and trans. 110–112). Carey (2019b: 35–44) has upheld the dating of *Fís Adamnáin* to c. 1000 on linguistic grounds, and promises to provide further non-linguistic evidence in support of this conclusion in a forthcoming article. The penitential response of the righteous souls in Paradise to Elijah's preaching of the Last Judgement demonstrates that the Paradise in which these works place Enoch and Elijah is a somewhat more imperfect state than the Third Heaven, where the *Visio* places them, and is thus, distinct from it. And even apart from their display of penitence, the very presence of such souls in this Paradise shows that it is the equivalent of what the *Visio* calls the *terra repromissionis* (the Land of Promise), rather than the equivalent of the Third Heaven, which is what the *Visio* itself opts to identify as Paradise. On the *Visio* and the *terra repromissionis*, see note 58.

⁶¹ Carey (2019a: 179–82).

⁶² In the case of Enoch, this idea is based, in the first place, on Genesis 5:21–4, which is in turn expanded upon by Hebrews 11:5: 'fide Enoch translatus est ne videret mortem et non inveniebatur quia transtulit illum Deus ante translationem enim testimonium habebat placuisse Deo' (= By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found because God took him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God); in the case of Elijah, on 2 Kings 2:1–15. On such basis, they came to be associated with the 'two witnesses' of Rev.3:2–13. The germ of this association and subsequent elaboration of the theory may found in Ecclesiasticus 44:16: 'Enoch placuit Deo et translatus est in paradiso ut det gentibus paenitentiam' (= Enoch pleased the Lord, and was translated, being an example of repentance to all generations), and 48:9–10

world. Of course, the *Suidigud*, in itself, can only be of limited relevance to the issue at hand, given that it was composed centuries later than the *Immacaldam* and the *Scél*. But then, it is not the earliest text in which we find such ideas.⁶³

The verse version of the voyage-tale, *Immram Snédgusa ocus Maic Riagla* – dated by Thomas Clancy to the rule of Máel Brigte mac Tornáin from Kells as the abbot of both the Armagh and Columban churches (891–927),⁶⁴ but by Kevin Murray to c.1000⁶⁵ – describes a voyage made by two clergymen associated with Colum Cille. The penultimate island they discover is a place *cen pecadh n-om cen chol cen cesadh cen gaile* ‘without crude sin, without transgression, without suffering, without blemish’,⁶⁶ which is inhabited by people who had been banished from Ireland, as well as Enoch and Elijah, all of whom await their martyrdom in the battle against the Antichrist at the end of the world.⁶⁷ Many of the Early Irish tales which speak of sea-voyages to a sinless earthly paradise are hagiographical.⁶⁸ Thus it is of no surprise here that our voyagers are clergy. But more significant for our purposes – given that Mongán is consistently understood to be a ruler of some kind, rather than a cleric – is that the greater part of the people they find living in this sinless place, awaiting the end of the world, are Irish lay-people, namely sixty couples of the Fir Rois. This is also, however, still a good deal later than the texts we are considering.

[concerning Elijah]: ‘qui receptus es in turbine ignis in curru equorum igneorum, / qui inscriptus es indiciis temporum et lenis iracundiam Domini conciliare cor patris ad filium et restituere tribus Iaco’ (= Who was taken up in a whirlwind of fire, and in a chariot of fiery horses: Who was ordained for reproofs in their times, to pacify the wrath of the Lord's judgment, before it broke forth into fury, and to turn the heart of the father unto the son, and to restore the tribes of Jacob’.

⁶³ For a helpful overview of this and other theories of the interim state of the soul relative to an early Irish context, see Wright (2014).

⁶⁴ Clancy (2000: 222), with a full account of the various versions of the text running from pages 212 to 225.

⁶⁵ Murray (2014: 764–5). This is solely on linguistic grounds. He leaves Clancy's arguments regarding intellectual and political context unanswered.

⁶⁶ *Immram Snédgusa ocus Maic Riagla* §53; Murray, ed. and trans. (2014: ed. 794 and trans. 795). Noting that ‘om’ seems to describe sin as a whole here, rather than designate a particular form of it. I have substituted Ó hAodha's translation (1997: 426) of ‘om’ as ‘crude’ here, since it, like Thurnysen's ‘roh’ (1904: 24), seems somewhat less figurative. My thanks to Christina Cleary (DIAS) and Andrea Palandri (DIAS) for their advice regarding the semantic range of this word.

⁶⁷ *Immram Snédgusa* §48–66; Murray, ed. and trans. (2014: ed. 792–6 and trans. 793–7).

⁶⁸ For instance, *The Litany of Irish Pilgrim Saints* [a.k.a. *The Litany of Irish Saints II*]; Plummer, ed. and trans., (1925: ed. 68–76 and trans. 69–77). It includes, in Dumville's (1976: 79) words, ‘allusions to voyages and the Land of Promise in connexion with SS. Ailbe, Ibar, Munnu mac Tulchain, and Patrick’, and has most recently been dated by Clancy (2000: 195) to c. 900. In this, Clancy affirms Mac Cana's (1980: 43, 76–7) and Sanderlin's (1975) earlier position. Carey argues (1982) that the very idea of a paradise over the sea is ecclesiastical in origin [repr. in Wooding, ed. (2000: 113–9)]. In this he confirms Carney's (1963: 40 n. 9) earlier comment [repr. in Wooding, ed. (2000: 42–51, at 46 n. 9)]. See also the gloss of §251 in the version of the *Immacaldam* found in Dublin, TCD 1319 (H.2.17), which says that the communities of Brendan, Cainnech and Munnu will settle the Land of Promise following the Apocalypse; found in Carey, ed. and trans. (2014: 641), with further sources listed on 631, n. 11.

CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES

Most relevant to this aspect of our Mongán texts are two early Old Irish tales: *Echtrae Chonnlai*⁶⁹ and *Immram Brain*.⁷⁰ And it is significant that it is these two accounts in particular that are the most relevant. We are already familiar with *Immram Brain* as a narrative that is understood to have been composed, together with the four early Mongán tales, in the scriptorium which produced *Cín Dromma Snechtai*. *Echtrae Chonnlai* is likewise understood to be a *Cín Dromma Snechtai* narrative, and indeed, to form a group within *Cín Dromma Snechtai* with *Echtrae Chonnlai*.⁷¹ Among the various forms of evidence which have suggested this are the many parallels they share, both textually and thematically.⁷² These tend to be interpreted as signs of its direct influence on *Immram Brain*'s composition rather than the reverse.⁷³ Moreover, the strength of these parallels is such that it has given rise to the further argument that *Immram Brain* was composed as a companion piece to *Echtrae Chonnlai*,⁷⁴ or more precisely, to *Echtrae Chonnlai* as, to some extent, refashioned by the author(s) of *Immram Brain*.⁷⁵ As a text, then, that appears to be closely related to *Immram Brain*, and likely to have exercised direct influence on it, any relevant features we find in

⁶⁹ McCone, ed. and trans. (2000a). Its editor (2000a: 29) argues for an early eighth-century date: '*Echtrae Chonnlai* belongs at least as far back as the Old Irish period of the eighth and ninth centuries [...] The text conforms so faithfully to Old Irish usage along with the odd possible hint of archaism that the former century seems rather more likely than the latter and, indeed, there is no apparent linguistic objection to a date as early as the first half of the eighth century'. Carey (1995a: 83–9, esp.89) suggests that its composition took place in the late seventh century, along with the other texts of the 'Midland Group': 'I propose accordingly that the midland group dates from the reign of Fínnechta Fledach mac Dúinchada, perhaps specifically from the years 688–9'. He has since reiterated this argument (2007: 28).

⁷⁰ McCone (2000a: 47) concluded that *Immram Brain* was, like *Echtrae Chonnlai*, composed in the eighth century, but that *Echtrae Chonnlai* was likely composed a little before it. Carey (1995a: 83–6) has argued that *Echtrae Chonnlai* not only preexisted the eight-century composition of *Immram Brain*, but that *Echtrae Chonnlai* directly influenced it. Stifter (2017: 30) has raised the possibility that *Echtrae Chonnlai* may have been composed in tandem with *Immram Brain*, or that the influence may run the other way, but does not advance any arguments against Carey or McCone in the process. Cf. Carney (1955: 292–3), where *Immram Brain* is taken to preexist and influence *Echtrae Chonnlai*. Cf. also Carney (1976: 193) and Nutt (1895–7b: 148–9), where it is suggested that they were both composed by the same author or school.

⁷¹ Part of the basis for this is the strong parallels in their manuscript transmission. On which, see Mac Mathúna (1985: 1–12); McCone (2000: 1–9; 29, 43–7, 108); White (2006: 11).

⁷² These parallels are described in Carey (1996: 83–7); McCone (2000: 106–19, esp. 115); White (2006: 56–7); Stifter (2017: 30; 2019a).

⁷³ See notes 70 and 75.

⁷⁴ McCone (2000: 74, 106, 109); Williams (2016: 56); Stifter (2017: 30).

⁷⁵ Bearing in mind that Carey (1995a: 86), who makes the strongest case for *Echtrae Chonnlai*'s influence on *Immram Brain*, has suggested that the author of *Immram Brain* derived *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* from a single source. However, he seems to see this editorial process as preceding the actual composition of *Immram Brain* and the four Mongán tales (1995a: 91), and thus, as not being influenced by it in turn. McCone (2000a: 114–6) concurs with the general outline of Carey's argument, but takes *Echtrae Chonnlai* to have been composed with a draft form of *Immram Brain* in mind, and perhaps, to have been retouched in light of a completed version.

Echtrae Chonnlaí will necessarily have the highest order of significance for our interpretation of the way that Mongán appears in *Immram Brain*, and in the four Mongán stories which were evidently composed together with it.

Like the Fir Rois in *Immram Snédgusa ocus Maic Riagla*, the eponymous heroes of these tales both travel to a sinless paradise⁷⁶ never to return to mortal lands. Enoch and Elijah do not appear in either instance⁷⁷ – the description of Eden in Genesis 1–3 replaces them as the dominant biblical reference point⁷⁸ – but Connlae’s and Bran’s avoidance of the normal human experience of death is also manifested as inseparable from answering a summons to live in such a place.⁷⁹ The inhabitants of this paradise are less explicitly awaiting the Resurrection and the Day of Judgement than they are in the *Suidigud* or *Immram Snédgusa*. Nevertheless, the Day of Judgement remains the limit of the undiminishing youth and beauty promised to Connlae,⁸⁰ and the repeated prophecies of Christ by inhabitants of this paradise,

⁷⁶ *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §3, 9 [= Carey (2011) §1, 9]; see Appendix 3 for text and translation. On the double-meaning of *síd* as both ‘peace’ and ‘hollow hill’ [i.e. otherworld-dwelling], see Ó Cathasaigh (1978) [repr. in Boyd, ed. (2014: 19–34); Carey (2011: 29). *Immram Brain* §9–10, 44–5; see Appendix 4 for text and translation. See also the similar idea in *Tochmarc Étaíne* III.10; Bergin and Best, ed. and trans. (1938: ed. 180 and trans. 181); Koch and Carey *et al*, trans. (2003: 146–65, at 160): ‘daine delgnaide cen ón / combart cen pecadh cen chol / Atchiam cach for cach leath, / 7 nícon aice nech; / teimel imorbuis Adaim / dodonarcheil ar araim’ (= splendid folk there without flaw / conception without sin or fault / We see everyone on every side, / and no one sees us; / it is the darkness of Adam’s sin / which prevents our being counted).

⁷⁷ This is interesting in itself. One might be tempted to argue that this reflects the influence of a text like *Visio Sancti Pauli*, which does not place Enoch and Elijah in the earthly paradise. However, the idea that a person can, while in their pre-resurrection body, inhabit such a place, seems as if it would most likely have emerged with reference to the early idea that Enoch and Elijah inhabit the earthly paradise bodily; see notes 56–8. If so, the secondary idea would then seem to be appearing in the absence of the primary idea which serves (or served) as its basis: a remarkable situation. This matter merits further study on another occasion.

⁷⁸ As Carney (1969: 162–5) and McCone (2000a: 80–82) have noted, the giving of the apple in *Echtrae Chonnlaí* is an inversion of the eating from the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis 3:16ff. *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §7–8; McCone, ed. and trans. (2000a: ed. 122 and trans. 159–63); see Appendix 5 for text and translation. *Immram Brain*’s comments on the Fall suggests that the sinless paradise it describes may be Eden itself; see *Immram Brain* §45; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 23 and trans. 22), in Appendix 4.

⁷⁹ *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §3, 9 [= Carey (2011) §1, 9]; McCone, ed. and trans. (2000a: ed. 121, 122 and trans. 132–6, 169–72); Carey, ed. and trans. (2011: 28 and 32). *Immram Brain* §9–10, 44–5; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 7, 23 and trans. 6, 22).

⁸⁰ *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §5; McCone, ed. and trans. (2000a: ed. 121 and trans. 144): ‘Ma cho-tum:éitis, ní: crínfa do delbae oitíu áilde / co bráth mbrindach’ (= If you come with me the youth (and) beauty of your appearance (/form) will not perish until the Judgement Day which is foretold). Note that for the sake of theological clarity I have exchanged McCone’s translation of ‘co bráth mbrindach’ (i.e. until dream-laden judgement) for Carey’s (1995b: 49) ‘until the Judgement Day which is foretold’. This remains close to the sense of Carney’s (1969: 163) [repr. in Bourke and Kilfearther *et al*, eds (2002: 268)] ‘until the Day of Doom’, but is preferable to it, since it makes sense of the way that ‘brindach’ modifies the meaning of ‘bráth’. See Carey (1995b: 49 n. 32) for further discussion of the sense of ‘brindach’ here, see (1995: 49 n. 32). Note that Carey’s translation is very close that of Pokorny (1928: 202), who had ‘until the vision-laden Last Judgement’. In his discussion of the grammar of this sentence, McCone cites Pokorny’s and Carey’s respective translations of this sentence in full. Nevertheless, he does not provide any reasons for preferring his own translation of ‘co bráth mbrindach’ to theirs (McCone 2000a: 21–2, 144).

in *Immram Brain*,⁸¹ together with their observation of the canonical hours,⁸² involve them in a gesture toward future realities that are far beyond the innocent enjoyment of corporeal perfections which currently characterises their existence. That is to say, the earthly paradise found in these texts is consistent with the later examples we considered above in not being confounded with the heaven of Christian expectation.⁸³ In its ‘ever-living’ (*bithbéo*) quality, its ‘permanence’ (*búaine*),⁸⁴ it is a typological anticipation of eternity rather than eternity itself.⁸⁵

Of course, in a pre-scholastic context, what one is to understand by ‘eternity’ (*aeternitas*), ‘eternal’ (*aeternus*) and their calques⁸⁶ will be somewhat ambiguous, since they can signify eternity in the sense of an infinite duration of time,⁸⁷ but also – when they are used in reference to the eternity in which God dwells – in the sense of a transcendent simultaneity that is wholly beyond the before and after of temporal process.⁸⁸ A good

⁸¹ *Immram Brain*, §26–8, 48; see Appendix 6 for text and translation. Theological prophecy is an aspect of *Echtrae Chonnlaí* as well; see *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §11; McCone, ed. and trans. (2000a: ed. 122 and trans. 181): ‘Mo-tub:ticfa a recht. / Con:scéra brichtu druad tárdecho / ar bélaib demuin duib dolbthig’ (= His law will soon come to you. He will destroy the spells of the druids of base teaching in front of the black, bewitching Devil).

⁸² *Immram Brain* §7: Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 7 and trans. 6): ‘7. Fil and bile co m-bláthaib forsngairet eóin do thráthaib: is tré cocetul is gnáth congairet uili cech tráth’ (= An ancient tree there is with blossoms, / On which birds call to the Hours. / ’Tis in harmony it is their wont / To call together every hour). The chanting of the canonical hours here is noted by Carney (1955: 283 n.1), Mac Cana (1972: 122–3) and Carey (1989a: 7).

⁸³ Pace Carey (2011: 33–6; 2015: 64–5); Siewers (2014).

⁸⁴ *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §3, 9; McCone, ed. and trans. (2000a: ed. 121, 122 and trans. 144, 170): ‘Mulier respondit: “Do:dechad-sa a tírib béo [...] 9. To-t:chuiretar bí bithbí”’ (= The woman replied, ‘I have come from [the] lands of [the] living [...] The everliving living invite you). *Immram Brain* §21; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 13 and trans. 12): ‘is i nImchiuin cach ági / dofeith búaine la háni’ (= into Imchiuin at every seasons / will come everlasting joy). See also the corresponding features of Carey’s text and translation in Appendix 3.

⁸⁵ Pace Carey (1987: 8; 2011: 33–6). He was right in claiming that otherworld temporality is qualitatively different from mortal time. This is everywhere evident, and beyond any serious dispute. However, he was wrong in seeing it as absolutely transcending temporality. For instance, the prophecies that residents of the earthly paradise make about future events, as future events, would not make sense from the perspective of a state in which ‘all time exists simultaneously in an eternal present’. See *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §11; McCone, ed. and trans. (2000a: ed. 122 and trans. 178–81); *Immram Brain* §16–21, 26–8, 48–57; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 11–15, 23–7 and trans. 10–14, 24–6). It remains that prophecy – whether by otherworldly beings, or by mortal humans – was likely understood to have its ultimate basis in an eternal perspective to which all times are simultaneously present (i.e. God’s). But as the ultimate basis of a knowledge which the prophet only sometimes has (however easily or frequently it might come to them), this higher perspective would necessarily be distinct from, and superior to, the temporal perspective that belongs to the prophet themselves on their own level. And this will be no less true of prophecies that, unlike those here, are given in the present tense. Ní Dhonnchadha (2007: 104) followed Carey in this, as did Siewers (2014: 335–8) and Williams (2016: 58–9).

⁸⁶ In the Old Irish glosses, the prefix ‘bith-’ and the adjective ‘suth[a]in’ stand out.

⁸⁷ This is what would come to be known as ‘aeviternity’ in Scholastic philosophy. For what would become its classic expression, see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia, Q.10, A.5–6; Gilby, ed. and trans. (1964–81, vol. ii: ed. 146–54 and trans. 147–55).

⁸⁸ Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae*, V.6ff. [prosa]; see Appendix 7 for text and translation. Augustine, *Confessiones*, I.vi (10), VII.xv (2), XI, esp. VII.xv (2); O’ Donnell, ed. (1992: 6, 83–4, 148–64, esp. 83–4); Chadwick, trans. (1991: 8, 126, 221–45, esp. 126): ‘et vidi [...] qui solus aeternus es, non post innumerable spatia temporum coepisti operari, quia omnia spatia temporum, et quae praeterierunt et quae praeteribunt, nec abirent nec venirent nisi te operante et manente (= And I saw that [...] you alone are eternal and did not first begin to work after innumerable periods of time. For all periods of time both past and future neither pass away

example of this semantic ambivalence is Bede's use of the term in *De temporum ratione*.⁸⁹ He primarily uses versions of *aeternitas*, and *aeternus* with reference to the state of human souls following the Last Judgement, but sometimes with reference to God. By describing God as the *autorem lucis aeternae* 'Creator of eternal light',⁹⁰ for instance, it seems to imply that he follows Augustine, as in so much else,⁹¹ in understanding God's eternity to transcend eternity in the sense of unlimited time. However, it is unclear if a medieval reader who was unfamiliar with the pertinent aspects of Augustine's thought would necessarily conclude this based on this text alone.

The prefix '*bith-*' has a similar ambiguity in the Old Irish Glosses, where its single application to God himself seems also to imply his transcendence of time, though not so clearly as to put the matter beyond doubt: *acht is est nammá robói and .i. fír .i. biddixnugud fírinne*⁹² 'but it is *Est* only that was in Him, that is the True, even eternal existence of truth'.⁹³ Yet despite the fact that it sometimes directly translates '*aeternus*'⁹⁴ the potential ambiguity of '*bith-*' goes further than it, in that it can also refer to a long but finite duration of time,⁹⁵ in this regard, seeming closer to the range of meanings evoked by '*saeculum*'.

To speak more precisely then, just as the innocent pleasures⁹⁶ of this earthly paradise act as a foretaste of the enjoyment of God himself by the immortal righteous, so the relative

nor come except because you bring that about, and you yourself permanently abide). See also, Augustine, *DCD*, XI.5–6, 21, XII.16–18; Dombart and Kalb, eds (1955, vol. ii: 325–6, 339–40, 370–5); Bettenson, trans. (1984: 434–6, 451–3, 490–6). Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, I.iv; Weber, ed. (1998: 70); Hill, trans. (2002: 41). Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram liber unus imperfectus*, XIII; Zycha, ed. (1894: 487); Hill, trans. (2002: 137–8). Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, VIII.20, 25–6; Zycha, ed. (1894: 258–9, 263–5); Hill, trans. (2002: 368–9, 372–4).

⁸⁹ *De temporum ratione*, preface, VI, XXX, XL, XLIII, LXVI, LXVII, LXIX, LXX, LXXI; Jones, ed. (1975–80, vol. ii: 263, 292, 374, 405, 413, 456, 478, 499, 529, 537, 539, 541, 542–4); Wallis, trans. (1999: 3, 25, 87, 110, 116, 151, 175, 200, 233, 240, 243, 245, 247–9).

⁹⁰ *De temporum ratione* XXX; Jones, ed. (1975–80, vol. ii: 374); Wallis, trans. (1999: 88).

⁹¹ For a list of Bede's many citations of Augustine, see Lapidge (2005: 196–204).

⁹² Note here that '*dixnugud*' (existence) is also a calque on Latin theological/philosophical terminology.

⁹³ Würzburg Glosses 14c 31; Stokes and Strachan, eds and trans. (1901–1910, vol. i: 595). See Exod. 3:14: 'Dixit Deus ad Moysen: Ego sum qui sum. Ait: Sic dices filiis Israël: Qui est, misit me ad vos' (= And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you).

⁹⁴ e.g. Würzburg Glosses 4a 13; Stokes and Strachan, eds and trans. (1901–1910, vol. i: 517).

⁹⁵ See, for example, the first quotation in note 121.

⁹⁶ Including romantic pleasures. Byrne's suggestion that Augustine's understanding of the sinless sexuality of Eden is operative here is undoubtedly correct; Byrne (2014: 101, incl. n. 9). Thus, Mac Cana (1976: 101) was right to conclude that Carney's unsuccessful attempt (1955: 287 n.1; 1969: 165; 1976: 84) to downplay the erotic dimension of the otherworld in *Immram Brain* (or elsewhere) was a result of his understanding that such texts are products of Christian scholarship. However, he was wrong in his assumption that Carney's characterisation of medieval Christian theology was correct. The stark dichotomy of sexless Christian paradise vs. sexual pagan paradise, to which Carney and Mac Cana both subscribed, falls apart in the light of Augustine's comments on the subject. See *DCD* XIV.xxi–xx, esp. xxiii; Dombart and Kalb, eds (1955, vol. ii: 443–50); Bettenson, trans. (1972: 583–92, esp. 585): 'Quisquis autem dicit non fuisse coituros nec generaturos, nisi peccassent, quid dicit, nisi propter numerositatem sanctorum necessarium hominis fuisse peccatum' (= If

(if limited) freedom from the demands of temporality, which the inhabitants of the earthly paradise seem to enjoy, foreshadows the absolutely unlimited perpetuity of that more perfect bliss which belongs to the beatific vision.⁹⁷ As such, the temporality of the earthly paradise – boundless as it appears by comparison with the narrow limitations of merely mortal time⁹⁸ – remains distinct from heaven's, so to speak, eternal temporality, and beyond that, from the atemporal eternity of God himself, which, when clearly distinguished from the former,⁹⁹ is understood to utterly transcend all temporal sequence.

Beyond what these tales have to say regarding the character of the earthly paradise itself, in its likeness to but distinction from heaven, it is of further significance that they also involve non-clerical mortals from Ireland coming to live a deathless life. Although we have also seen this in the *Suidigud* and *Immram Snédgusa*, the proximity of *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immram Brain* in both time and context to the *Immacaldam* and the *Scél* make this a notable feature. For Mongán himself, as we have noted, is some kind of ruler, rather than a clerical figure. Yet the most important detail in these stories, relative to the matter at hand, is their identification of the otherworld of the sagas with the sinless earthly paradise of Christian theology.¹⁰⁰ This is a question of the beings whom they understand to be the natural inhabitants of such a paradise. The exceptional people who leave the lands of mortality behind to become residents of this sinless paradise are, by definition, not indigenous to it.

The question of what sort of beings might belong there originally (and continue to belong there) is not an issue that is addressed in the *Suidigud* or *Immram Snédgusa* or, to my

anyone says that there would have been no intercourse or procreation if the first human beings had not sinned, he is asserting, in effect, that man's sin was necessary to complete the number of the saints).

⁹⁷ Among other things this means that something along the lines of the allegorical reading of Song of Songs, as suggested by McCone (2000b: 81–2), is still on the table. Because the consummation of erotic desire, in either instance, appears to occur without sin in this paradise, it will be a more adequate image of the union of the soul and God, or Christ and the Church/Resurrected Cosmos than that which is found in fallen human marriages. The wellspring of subsequent allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs is Origen; *Commentarium in Canticum Cantorum*, esp. prologue, ii; *PG* 13, esp. col.71–2; Lawson, trans. (1957: esp. 36–9). For this theme in medieval exegesis more generally, see Matter (1990) and Turner (1995). For a good general characterisation of Origen's interpretation, see King (2005).

⁹⁸ The seminal study of this contrast remains Carey (1987: 7ff.).

⁹⁹ One cannot necessarily assume of a given medieval writer that their concept of God's eternity will be qualitatively distinct from the limitless time which is taken to characterise the existence of the angels and resurrected saints. For example, Eriugena understood his disagreement with Gottschalk about predestination to be due, in part, to Gottschalk's failure to properly distinguish between limitless time and God's complete transcendence of time itself. See Eriugena, *De divina praedestinatione*, IX.5ff.; Mainoldi, ed. (2003: 94–8); Brennan, trans. (1998: 62–3). See discussion in Moran (2002: 494–5).

¹⁰⁰ Among other patristic and apocryphal sources, some form of the Book of Enoch is likely to have been significant for Early Irish thinking about the earthly paradise. On the Book of Enoch in early medieval Ireland, see McNamara (1975: 24–7; 2003: 78–9). Relevant passages of the extant Amharic version include 1 Enoch 23–5, 32, 60.8, 65.1–3, 70, 77.3, 106.8; Knibb, ed. and trans. (1978, ed. vol. i: 84–91, 100–103, 162–3, 187, 208–9, 250–51, 410 and trans. vol. ii: 112–4, 120–23, 143–4, 153–4, 165, 180–81, 245). For some of the other relevant patristic and apocryphal sources, see notes 57–8.

knowledge, in the patristic and apocryphal speculation which informs them. Their concerns in this area tend to be more apocalyptic than cosmological. However, according to *Echtrae Chonnlaí* and *Immram Brain*,¹⁰¹ the native inhabitants of this earthly paradise are evidently the deathless people of the *síde*,¹⁰² the same as are always getting mixed up elsewhere with the likes of Cú Chulainn, Conaire Mór and Finn mac Cumail in stories of the pre-Christian past.¹⁰³ In which case, the earthly paradise, in such a view, is not simply a remote place where the disembodied righteous await their resurrection – or a blissful embodied few, the glory of martyrdom at the end of the world – but an ever-present reality whose inhabitants are somehow aware of, interested in and, moreover, involved in, the secular hierarchies to which these notables belong, and were so, long before Christian penitents began to seek the company of Enoch or Elijah there.¹⁰⁴

For our purposes, one of the most interesting examples of this awareness, interest and involvement is that, in *Immram Brain*, the paradisaic inhabitant who prophesies to Bran and his companions concerning the advent of Christ, as of Mongán after him, is himself the soon-to-be father of Mongán. Our hypothetical solution to the ambiguity of whether Mongán is the sort of person who dies or not is now not looking like so much of a stab in the dark. However, it now requires reformulation. This is no longer a question of whether Mongán is thought to be an exemplary, but mortal, human who, by some special grace, has gone away, like Enoch and Elijah, like Fintan and the Fir Rois, or even like Connlae and Bran, to live in everlasting youth in the earthly paradise until the end of the world. It is a question of whether he is, in his very nature, thought to be one of the proper inhabitants of such a place, or at least more so

¹⁰¹ See Appendix 3. *Immram Brain* does not actually use the term *áes síde*. However, among other things, its identification of one of their number as Manannán mac Lir leaves no doubt regarding what kind of people they are supposed to be; §32ff.; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 16ff. and trans. 17ff.). See further discussion on p. 21.

¹⁰² Ó Cathasaigh (1978: 149) [repr. in Boyd, ed. (2014: 19–34, at 29)]: ‘*síd* enjoys a special status as a term for the Otherworld: it is the normal generic term which can be used without further definition to denote the Otherworld [...] It is true that, when used of a particular localization of the Otherworld, *síd* seems almost invariably to refer to a mound or a tumulus [...] But when used less specifically in collocations such as *ben síde* it must mean simply “(the) Otherworld”: thus, *ben síde* (or *ben a sídib*) “goddess, woman of the Otherworld,” *fer síde* “god, man of the Otherworld,” *áes síde* “Otherworld folk, gods”.’

¹⁰³ See, for example, *De Gabáil in t-Shída*, in Hull, ed. and trans. (1933: ed. 55–6; Koch and Carey *et al*, trans. (2003: 145). *Tochmarc Étaíne* I.23, III.15–20; Bergin and Best, ed. and trans. (1938: ed. 158–9 and trans. 184–9); Koch and Carey *et al*, trans. (2003: 146–65, at 153, 161–3). *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* §3, 35; Knott, ed. (1936: 2, 10); Koch and Carey *et al*, [partial] trans. (2003: 166–84, at 167, 173). *Echtra Chorbmaic Uí Chuinn*; Hull, ed. and trans. (1949); Koch and Carey *et al*, trans. (2003: 184–7). *Macgnímartha Find* §21–8; Meyer, ed. (1882: 202–4); Koch and Carey *et al*, trans. (2003: 194–201, at 198–201). Cf. *Tirechani collectanea de sancto Patricio* XXVI.1–3; Bieler, ed. and trans. (1979: 122–65, ed. at 142 and trans. 143), where two daughters of king Loíguire briefly mistake Patrick and his companions for ‘*uiros síde aut deorum terrenorum aut fantassiam*’ (= men of the other world or earth-gods, or a phantom).

¹⁰⁴ Carey (2011: 35).

than he is a proper inhabitant of mortal lands. According to the perspective of *Immram Brain*, Mongán's father is just such a natural inhabitant of this sinless paradise.¹⁰⁵ This being so, is it possible that, like all its native inhabitants, he is inherently deathless in a way that mere visitors to it, such as the hapless Nechtan, are not?¹⁰⁶ Which is to say, might the openendedness concerning Mongán's ultimate death – exhibited by the *Scél*, and one of the early interpretations of the *Immacaldam* – emerge as no more than the simple result of *Immram Brain*'s understanding of his lineage? There is, at any rate, nothing intrinsic to the portrayal of the Mongán of the *Immacaldam* or the *Scél* which would be in tension with such an interpretation. Given the textual and thematic connexions that are shared by these accounts of Mongán,¹⁰⁷ it certainly seems to be best way of accounting for all the relevant details without then involving them in direct contradiction of each other. However, the *Immacaldam* allows us to confirm this with a much higher order of certainty.

INTERTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS: *CÍN DROMMA SNECHTAI*

The significance of the *Immacaldam* will be best appreciated if we first review what has been said to this point regarding the interrelations of all these texts, according to the current consensus. It is understood that *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán stories (including the *Scél*) were all composed in a eighth-century east-Ulster scriptorium by the scholar(s) responsible for the production of *Cín Dromma Snechta* as a whole.¹⁰⁸ *Echtrae Chonnlaí* and the *Immacaldam* seem to have pre-existed these texts, and to have served as a partial basis for their composition.¹⁰⁹ Albeit, the influence appears not to flow in strictly one direction. And among the potential examples of this, one in particular is of undeniable significance for the matters at hand. Carey has convincingly argued that the *Immacaldam*'s identification of the youth of the *Immacaldam* as Mongán was subsequently introduced by the creative activity responsible for *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán texts.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ *Immram Brain* §44; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 23 and trans. 22). For the text and translation, see Appendix 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Immram Brain* §63–5, esp. 65; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 33–5, esp. 33 and trans. 32–4, esp. 33): ‘Dochurethar úadib in fer assin churuch. Amal conránic side fri talmain in na Hérenn, bá lúathred fochétóir amal bíd i talmain nobeth tríasna hilchéta blíedne’ (= The man leaps from them out of the coracle. As soon as he touched the earth of Ireland, forthwith he was a heap of ashes, as though he had been in the earth for many hundred years).

¹⁰⁷ See note 72.

¹⁰⁸ See pp. 11–12.

¹⁰⁹ See pp. 15–16.

¹¹⁰ Carey (1995a: 82–3; 2002: 62; 2007: 33), following Carney (1976: 192). White largely confirms Carey's position in his earlier paper (1995a), but maintains the possibility that the *Immacaldam* may perhaps have been

This understanding of their textual interrelationships suggests, in the first place, that those responsible for the composition of *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán tales were in a position to make use of any aspects of *Echtrae Chonnlai* and the *Immacaldam* that they may have seen as relevant to the ambiguities that make Mongán hard to place in the order of reality. In addition, since *Immram Brain* and the four Mongán stories seem to have been produced together, one should, until it is proven otherwise, expect that their respective portrayals of Mongán will mutually inform each other. Cumulatively then, this leads us to expect a unified vision of Mongán, between these five texts, in which the relevant materials in *Echtrae Chonnlai* and the *Immacaldam* will also have been harmonised. It remains possible that this harmonisation may, in turn, have led to the further revision of one, or both, of these source texts, and perhaps even guided their initial composition, to some extent or another. But the question of which way this ambiguity falls is not especially important for the current argument. For insofar as we are investigating what these texts meant in the context of *Cín Dromma Snechta*, any one of these possibilities requires that we read all the relevant texts in light of each other. Finally, one must also bear in mind that the physical proximity of all these texts to each other in *Cín Dromma Snechta* would have encouraged subsequent readers to interpret them as interpreting each other.¹¹¹ In which case, reading them as mutually illuminating promises to reveal, not only the way that the composers of *Immram Brain* and the four Mongán tales understood what they wrote (and two of the texts on which they based that writing), but also how they were likely to have been understood thereafter.

Much of this has been said already relative to the claim that *Immram Brain*'s portrayal of Mongán should be interpreted as being consonant with the portrayals of Mongán in the four early Mongán texts, and with the identification of the otherworldly youth in the *Immacaldam* as Mongán. Earlier this meant that the short life prophesied for Mongán in *Immram Brain* should be placed in the context of the long and possibly unlimited process of rebirths attributed to him by the *Immacaldam* and the *Scél*.¹¹² Just now, it has meant that the process of rebirths described by these latter texts should be placed in the context of *Immram*

created together with *Immram Brain* and the Mongán texts, rather than being a preexisting source that they drew upon; White (2006: 46, 56–7). However, were this to be so, it would only strengthen Carey's case concerning the context in which the identification of the youth of the *Immacaldam* as Mongán took place.

¹¹¹ Bearing in mind that part of the evidence for these texts having once been together in the lost *Cín Dromma Snechta* is that they regularly appear in the same extant manuscripts. On this, see note 5. In which case, what is said here regarding the interpretation of these texts that would have been implicit in *Cín Dromma Snechta* itself, applies, in varying degrees, to many of the existing manuscripts as well. Here LU, YBL, TCD MS H 4.22 (1363), RIA MS 23 N 10 (the Book of Ballycumin), TCD MS H.3.18 (1337) and BL Egerton MS 88 are notable.

¹¹² See pages 11–12 above.

Brain's claim that his father is a native – and thus deathless – inhabitant of the sinless earthly paradise. We shall see now how the *Immacaldam* allows the necessity of both arguments to be demonstrated with greater precision.

The youth which some, it says, identify as Mongán, has evidently come from the same sinless paradise as the mysterious woman who first appears to Bran, summoning him to travel there. We cannot conclude this based on any direct statements in the *Immacaldam* regarding the place he has come from,¹¹³ but such a conclusion seems to be inescapable when we consider its linguistic and structural parallels with *Immram Brain*. Both texts use exactly the same phrase to describe the place from which the otherworld visitor has come. They come *a tírib ingnad* 'from lands of strange things'.¹¹⁴ Both protagonists, moreover, subsequently disappear in such a way that those present do not know where they went,¹¹⁵ the latter being something which they also have in common with the otherworldly woman of *Echtrae Chonnlai*.¹¹⁶

This disappearance from sight is the key to understanding the significance of the parallels at issue here. For in *Immram*, *Echtrae* and *Immacaldam* alike, it is only the natural inhabitants of the earthly paradise that are capable of doing this. Moreover, the one mortal visitor who manages to return to mortal lands – Nechtan, in the *Immram* – does so by means of moving through space in the manner of a normal physical body, and, having done so, immediately withers into ash upon arrival.¹¹⁷ Whereas Mongán, prior to disappearing back where he came from, seems no worse for his experience of mortal lands. There are certainly reasons besides these for supposing that Mongán is understood to be more like the inhabitants

¹¹³ See, however, the Middle Irish poem beginning 'Coinne Mongain is Coluim caim', where Mongán is quoted as saying that he has come to Colum Cille from the 'Land of Promise' (*Tír Taingire*); Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: 87).

¹¹⁴ The *Immacaldam*, lines 20–21; Carey, ed. and trans. (2002: ed. 60 and trans. 61): 'Do-dechad-sa' ol inde óclach, 'a tírib ingnad, a tírib gnáth' (= 'I come,' said the youth, 'from lands of strange things, from lands of familiar things'). *Immram Brain* §1; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 3 and trans. 2): 'Cóica rand rogab in ben a tírib ingnath for láur in tige do Bran mac Febail' (= 'Twas fifty quatrains the woman from lands of strange things sang on the floor of the house to Bran son of Febal' [translation lightly modified to bring out its mirroring of the *Immacaldam*'s phrasing, as translated by Carey]). For discussion of the correspondences listed here, and more besides, see Carey (1995: 79).

¹¹⁵ The *Immacaldam*, lines 26–7; Carey, ed. and trans. (2002: ed. 60 and trans. 61): 'Óro glé, co n-accatar talmairiu do-celar erru ind óclach. Ní fetatar cia luid nó can to-luid' (= When [the conversation] ended, they suddenly saw that the youth was hidden from them. They did not know whither he went, nor whence he came). *Immram Brain* §31; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 17 and trans. 16): 'Luid in ben úadib iarom annadfetatar cia luid, ocus birt a cróib lee' (= Thereupon the woman went from them, while they know knew not whither she went. And she took her branch with her).

¹¹⁶ Although, in her case, this occurs in the context of the king's *magus* attempting to drive her away, at the king's request. Moreover, it also differs in that she was invisible to all but Connlae beforehand; *Echtrae Chonnlai* §4, 7; see Appendix 8 for text and translation.

¹¹⁷ See note 106.

of the earthly paradise than those of the mortal world. Among them, there is the fact that Mongán is seen by Colum Cille as an authoritative and fitting interlocutor for speech of *rún nemdae 7 talmandae* ‘heavenly and earthly mysteries’ that are best kept from mortals.¹¹⁸ But given what we know about the interrelationships shared by this text with *Echtrae Chonnlaí* and *Immram Brain*, it is his disappearance which is the most decisive signal that, whatever ambiguities remain, he is fundamentally one of the *áes síde* from its perspective.

That said, it seems likely enough that the identification of the otherworld youth with Mongán in *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* did not belong to it originally. We have already noted Carey’s argument that this identification reflects the influence of the creative process that produced *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán stories.¹¹⁹ But if so, it would indicate that their authors were already thinking of Mongán beforehand as a person who was more fundamentally a native of the earthly paradise, where the undying people of his father lived, than the human world, where he was a prince of Dál nAraide. Were this not the case, it would have been impossible for them to recognize Mongán in the story of a youth who clearly belongs to that other world. As such, the reason that Mongán’s beginning and end are unclear in the *Scél* is simply that the inhabitants of the earthly paradise have been present from the creation, and will remain unaging until the end of the world. This also means that the ‘*bithu síru, Cét mblédne i findríg*’ which the Mannanán mac Lir of the *Immram* prophesies that Mongán will have following the death of his coming embodiment, is not, as Carney would have it, an eternity in heaven,¹²⁰ but a long yet finite interval in the earthly paradise to which he most truly belongs on this side of the Judgement.¹²¹

This makes the ambiguity regarding his true embodiment a bit of a non-issue. If he is not going to die in any final way before the end of the world, any questions regarding the nature of his resurrected body are suspended almost indefinitely. But then it remains unlikely that these concerns would even apply to the, in some sense, ‘divine’ inhabitants of the earthly paradise. The patristic critiques of the possibility of serial rebirths are concerned with the fate

¹¹⁸ The *Immacaldam*, lines 22–30; see Appendix 9 for text and translation.

¹¹⁹ See p. 21 above, incl. note 110.

¹²⁰ Carney’s interpretation of this passage (1976: 193) is embedded in his argument: ‘Manannán also foresees that Mongán’s life will be short. But the *drong find*, the fair host (of angels), will take him away and he will be “through eternities of / centuries” in a fair kingdom.’

¹²¹ *Immram Brain* §55 [McCone (2005) / White (2006) §6]; McCone ed. (2005: 145); White, trans. (2006: 40): ‘Bíeid tre bithu síru, Cét mblédne i findríg’ (= He will be through long ages, a hundred years in bright kingship). This likely means (*pace* Carney) that the ‘*drong find*’ (fair host) which will take him there is just as likely to be composed of other indigenous inhabitants of the earthly paradise as angels; *Immram Brain* §59 [McCone (2005) / White (2006) §10]; McCone, ed. (2005: 145); White, trans. (2006: 41): ‘Géibthai in drong find’ (= The fair host will take him).

of mortal humans, and immortal angels and devils. Insofar as such ever-living beings appear to be none of these things, as beings that can die, but not (before the end of the world itself) with any finality, it is at least possible that a process of ongoing reembodiment is conceived as natural for them, especially given how frequently they are portrayed as undergoing such a process. An earlier form of the extant *Tochmarc Étaíne*, one of the texts which would best seem to support such a conclusion,¹²² is, after all, thought to have included in *Cín Dromma Snechtai*, together with these stories of Mongán.¹²³

But while it seems clear that the authors of *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán tales (and the editors, if not the authors, of the *Immacaldam*) understand him to be one of the ever-living people of the sinless earthly paradise, rather than a properly mortal inhabitant of this world, it was certainly not a priority for them to state this unambiguously. We have seen that it is everywhere implied, and sometimes shown, but nowhere directly claimed. In this they are in stark contrast to the later accounts of Tuán mac Cairill and Fintan mac Bóchra, where great pains are taken to define their reembodiments in a way that anticipates any theological objections. What then is preoccupying about Mongán for these texts if the definition of his place in Christian eschatology and cosmology is not?

MONGÁN AS AN APOLOGY FOR NATURAL LAW

This begins to become evident when we observe the ideological disparity between these Mongán texts and those which describe the reembodiments of Tuán and Fintan. In the case of the latter, the restoration of the ancient person's human form in the Christian Era, as a prelude to a final death which breaks the cycle of embodiment, serves to do more than satisfy any eschatological concerns about the resurrection body. It also confines the body of extra-ecclesiastical knowledge that they exhibit and represent to the past. They have passed on the knowledge which has been enabled by their miraculously enabled longevity to the saints who, in turn, have passed it on to ecclesiastical scholarship.¹²⁴ This is, on the one hand, a powerful affirmation of the body of extra-ecclesiastical knowledge which is attributed to them, one of the relevant texts even going so far as to claim that all subsequent historical and genealogical scholarship in Ireland is based on this saintly mediation of their knowledge.¹²⁵ However, on

¹²² See other references to *Tochmarc Étaíne* in notes 27, 34, 76 and 103.

¹²³ Carey (1995: 89–91); Stifter (2019b).

¹²⁴ Carey (2011: 10).

¹²⁵ e.g. *STMC*, lines 78–81; Carey, ed. (1984: 102); Koch and Carey *et al*, trans. (2003: 223–5, at 225): ‘Anait sechtmain i ssuidiu oc imaccallaim. Nach senchas 7 nach genelach fil i nHére is ó Thuán mac Cairill a bunadus.

the other, it would appear to undermine any perceived need for further extra-ecclesiastical knowledge in the present, especially insofar as it pertains to the recovery of lost history. If all subsequent historical and genealogical knowledge depends on the saintly mediation of this knowledge, this does not, for instance, seem to leave much room for the recovery of lost history through the inspiration of poets, such as we find attested in *Sanas Cormaic*, and other subsequent texts.¹²⁶ In short, such accounts seem to sit better with attempts to minimise the ongoing importance of the inspired knowledge often associated with the secular hierarchies of poets and rulers than with attempts to emphasize it. Although, there is, in principle, no reason the idea that lost history may be retrieved through some form of inspiration could not be brought into agreement with the idea that it may be retrieved through chance encounters with miraculously long-lived ancients, a possibility which is variously realised in *Airne Fíngéin*,¹²⁷ *Suidigud Tellaig Temra*¹²⁸ and *Acallam na Senórach*,¹²⁹ among other places.

Our Mongán texts are another matter.¹³⁰ The representative of extra-ecclesiastical knowledge that they describe persists in living and will likely live until the end of the world. Moreover, in all instances, Mongán's knowledge is not limited to that of a long-lived multi-

Attraglastar Pátraic ri sin 7 atcuaid dó 7 atraglastar Colum Cille 7 atcuaid Finnia dó i fiadnaisi lochta in tíre' (= They remained there conversing for a week; every history and genealogy in Ireland derives from Tuán son of Cairell. Patrick had spoken with him before that, and he had told [these things] to him; and Colum Cille had spoken with him. And Finnia spoke with him in the presence of the people of the region).

¹²⁶ *Sanas Cormaic* is notable for such stories. For the story how Lugaid comes to know the lost history of a lap-dog by putting his poet's staff on its head, see *Sanas Cormaic* Y 323; Russell, Arbuthnot and Moran, eds (2006–); Russell, trans. (2008: 33–4). For other similar examples, see *Sanas Cormaic* Y 883, 1018; Russell, Arbuthnot and Moran, eds (2006–). See also *UB II* [CIH 552.3]; Carey, ed. and trans. (1997: 41–58, at 54): 'Dícedal do cennaib .i. adhbail-cantain do cennaib na tulach go tabraid a n-infoilghí airgid dó nó co roinnisidh a n-indsencas' (= Díchetal di chennaib, i.e., great chanting to the tops of the hills so that they give their silver treasures to him, or so that he may relate their *dindshenchas*). For discussion of these examples, see Carey (1997: 47–8, 54ff.). See also *Do Faillsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge*; Murray, ed. and trans. (2001). On the portrayal, in *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* [TBDD], of the knowledge which is received from the otherworld and expressed in *rosc* as 'trapping past, present and future within a timeless realm', see O'Connor (2008: 65). We have already established that the otherworld itself is not itself timeless, but this remains an apt description of the inspiration which it mediates. O'Connor develops the temporal ambivalence of poetic inspiration described here only in the direction of the prophetic revelation of the future, but possibility for the prophetic recovery of the past is also implicit in his characterisation of its role in TBDD.

¹²⁷ In this account of Fintan mac Bóchra, he is unable to tell the things he has seen since the Flood because of his muteness until a 'spirit of prophecy' (*spirut faitsine*) descends on him; *Airne Fíngéin* §4; Vendryes (1953: 5–7); Cross and Brown, trans. (1918: 36–37) [translation based on text of older edition found in Scarre (1907–13: 3)].

¹²⁸ Fintan's historical knowledge does not only come from all the things he has witnessed through his many transformations but also from a divine source: namely, Trefuilngid; *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §31; Best, ed. and trans. (1910: ed. 152 and trans. 153): 'ba haingel Dé héside, nó fa Día féisin' (= he was an angel of God, or he was God himself).

¹²⁹ Most often, in the *Acallam*, poetic inspiration involves prophecies of the future, rather than revelations regarding what has already occurred in the past, but there is at least one instance of the latter. Finn, by his tooth of wisdom, is able to discern the identity of the thief of some dogs, who has otherwise left no trace; Stokes, ed. (1880–1909: 7); Dooley and Roe, trans. (1999: 9).

¹³⁰ Cf. Carey (2011: 7), where he characterises *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill* as a 'warmer treatment of the theme' than the *Immacaldam*.

formed observer, but includes an understanding of things that are not available to the normal operation of human thought in any embodiment. In the *Immacaldam*, his knowledge extends, as we have seen, to ‘heavenly and earthly mysteries’ that are beyond what is generally advisable for mortals to even hear about.¹³¹ *Immram Brain* likewise has him relating ‘mysteries’ (*rúna*).¹³² The *Scél* does not claim so much, but nevertheless portrays him as having confident and accurate foreknowledge of the approach of Caílte’s assistance.¹³³ In short, he is portrayed as exhibiting the knowledge and prophetic power that many of the early Irish law-tracts and sagas would lead us to expect of those who preside at the pinnacle of the secular hierarchies, that is, those whom the Holy Spirit is thought to have inspired with the knowledge of the law of nature (*recht aicnid / lex naturae*) to a superlative degree.¹³⁴

Insofar as his human embodiment is concerned, he is certainly the right sort of person to be enjoying such inspiration, seeing as he is, like Cormac mac Airt¹³⁵ (and Cú Chulainn,

¹³¹ See pp. 23–4. Mac Cana (1975: 43–5) rightly compared the necessity of not repeating these mysteries to the to the similar necessity that St. Paul not repeat what he heard when he has been caught up to the Paradise of the Third Heaven. 2 Cor. 12:2–4: ‘scio hominem in Christo ante annos quattuordecim sive in corpore nescio sive extra corpus nescio Deus scit raptum eiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum / et scio huiusmodi hominem sive in corpore sive extra corpus nescio Deus scit / quoniam raptus est in paradysum et audivit arcana verba quae non licet homini loqui’; (= I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, [whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;] such an one caught up to the third heaven. / And I knew such a man, [whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;] / How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter). His ultimate dismissal of this evidence leaves him without one of the best ways of accounting for how the pre-Christian continuities he wants to see here would have been rendered intelligible in a medieval Christian context. As Johnston (2015: 426) notes, the idea that Mongán’s knowledge has continuity with a pre-Christian past, and the idea that it has a likeness to the knowledge that was revealed to St. Paul in Paradise, are not mutually exclusive possibilities here.

¹³² Carey (1995: 79). *Immram Brain* §52; Meyer, ed., and trans. (1895–7: ed. 25 and trans. 24): ‘adfii rúna, rith ecni’ (= He will make known mysteries—a course of wisdom—); ‘mysteries’ replaces Meyer’s ‘secrets’ here to match Carey’s translation of ‘rúna’ in the *Immacaldam*.

¹³³ The *Scél* §7; White, ed. and trans. (2006: ed. 73 and trans. 80).

¹³⁴ The *locus classicus* for this theme is the Prologue to *Senchas Már*; Carey, ed. and trans. (1994a). See discussion in McLeod (1982); McCone (1986); Ó Corráin (1987); Carey (1990); Watson (2018a). However, to date, the only detailed treatment of this theme in early Irish literature as a whole is Watson (2018b, vol. i: 73–173).

¹³⁵ According to the Cormac of *Tecosca Cormaic*, a king is not only required to be proficient in poetic *roscada*, but every art; *Tecosca Cormaic* §3, lines 40–4; Fomin, ed. and trans. (2013: ed. 150–60, at 154 and trans. 149–161, at 155: ‘Foglaímm cach dána, / Eólas cech bérilai, / Druine m(b)rechtrad, / Tacra co fásaigib, / Brithemnas co roscadaib’ (= Learning every art, / Knowledge of every specialist language, / Craftsmanship of variegated works, / Law-suit based on legal precedents, / judgement with *roscada* [trans. lightly edited]).

in some manner of speaking),¹³⁶ taken to be a ruler who is also a master of poetry.¹³⁷ As such, his correction of his poet, Forgoll, about a point of history, and his subsequent neutralisation of the threat posed by him, do not seem as if they should be read as anti-poetic polemic.¹³⁸ Among other things, Mongán seems to take Forgoll's threat of satire, and of making the land barren through his chanting, quite seriously.¹³⁹ If anything, the *Scél* seems to be an example of the contention, familiar to us from *Tecosca Cormaic*, that it is the kingly rather than the poetic role which preeminently possesses the arts and, therefore, the natural revelation by which they operate.¹⁴⁰ This would mean that the poet is not wrong in being poetic so much as in not showing due deference the preeminence of royal judgment over his and every art.¹⁴¹

The identification of the youth of the *Immacaldam* as Mongán is particularly significant for our consideration of these differences. For of all the early Mongán texts, it is this text alone that includes the familiar trope of the saint who is interested in hearing, and does hear, the extra-ecclesiastical knowledge of the long-lived person who has been undergoing reembodiments, in this case, seemingly inspired extra-ecclesiastical knowledge. However, here, the saint has by no means been exhaustive in his mediation of extra-ecclesiastical knowledge to the ecclesiastical hierarchies. In the first place, the saint does not

¹³⁶ According to *Mesca Ulad*, Cú Chulainn was king over a third of Ulster for a year's time; *Mesca Ulad* §3–4; Watson, ed. (1941: 2); Koch and Carey *et al*, trans. (2003: 106–27, at 106–7). My thanks to Elizabeth Boyle for this reference. See also, *Brisleach Mór Maige Muirthemni* [BMMM], where he is felled by a spear which has been prophesied to kill a king; BMMM §20; Kimpton, ed. and trans. (2009: ed. 23 and trans. 42): 'Íar sin dano rogab Lugaid in tres gai indlithi ra boí oc maccaib Calatín Cid bias din gai-seo, a maccu Calatín Tuitfid rí dé ar meic Calatín' (= After that Lugaid grasped one the three prepared spears of the sons of Calatín. 'What will come of this spear, sons of Calatín?' 'A king will fall by it,'). For his poetic and legal training by Sencha mac Ailela, Amaingen and Morann, see *Compert Con Culainn* §7.14ff.; van Hamel, ed. (1933: 7–8); Duvau, trans. (1888: 8–9). For Cú Chulainn prophesying in poetic *rosc[ad]*, see BMMM §10, 31; Kimpton, ed. and trans. (2009: ed. 16–18, 28–9 and trans. 38, 46–7).

¹³⁷ See White's discussion and presentation of the evidence (in these early Mongán-*tales* and elsewhere) that illustrates Mongán's association with *filid*, and yet his superiority to them; White (2006: 1–3). However, her tentative conclusion that this may reflect an anti-*filid* perspective seems not to follow from this, especially as Mongán seems to be idealised precisely for his superlative possession of the qualities associated with them.

¹³⁸ Toner (2005: 76); Stifter (2017: 31–2). Cf. Mac Cana (1972: 134); McCone (2000b: 201).

¹³⁹ The *Scél* §4; White, ed. and trans. (2006: ed. 73 and trans. 79–80): 'Do:arcaid Mongán a réir ndó di sétaib co:tici secht cumala no da secht cumal no tri secht cumal. Tarcaid asennad trian no leth a ferainn no a ferann n-óg asennad acht a soíri a óenur cona mnaí Bréothigirn mani:forsulcad co cenn treisse' (= Mongán offered him what he desired of treasures up to seven cumals or twice seven cumals or thrice seven cumals. Finally he offered a third or half of his land or his entire land at last, save only his only freedom with [that of] his wife Bréothigern unless he redeem [himself] by the end of three days).

¹⁴⁰ See notes 134–5. For discussion, references and further examples, see Watson (2018b, vol. i: 152ff.). It is worth noting here in what follows that *Tecosca Cormaic* is found immediately after the *Immacaldam* in TCD MS H 2. 17 (1319), on p. 178; see Abbott and Gwynn (1921: 112).

¹⁴¹ Thus, agreeing in every respect with White's following statement, but not the conclusions she derived from it following Mac Cana and McCone; White (2006: 53): 'What all this would seem to suggest is that Mongán (much like Tuán and Fergus) is a central player in the validation of the earliest Irish narrative writing. While represented as superior in knowledge and wisdom to the greatest poet(s) in Ireland he is, at the same time, portrayed as being connected with the church in his associations with Colum Cille and in the parallels drawn between his birth and Christ'.

and will not convey this knowledge to his monks because he deems such knowledge unfitting for mortals; in the second, there is no indication that future meetings, either with him, or with some other saint may not occur in the future. In which case, the identification of the youth of the *Immacaldam* with Mongán, among other things, highlights the ongoing need in the Christian Era for the particular way that the Holy Spirit is taken to be revealed to and through secular hierarchies in contrast to the ecclesiastical. Just as Mongán himself shows no sign of dying, or of his knowledge ever being fully grasped by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, those who have a comparable proficiency in these modes of inspiration will always be necessary. For the saints are the only ones besides themselves who may fully partake of its results without risk of harm.

This does not then signify that these texts are no more than an allegory of political theology. It would seem closer to the mark to interpret this as an example of the tendency of Early Irish literature to use the figures of historiography as the means of working out abstract concepts, rather than formal dialectic.¹⁴² The history must be what it is because reality as experienced in the present – personally and institutionally – must be an intelligible result of it. But beyond history, part of what is so fascinating here is the cosmology that evidently becomes necessary relative to the extra-ecclesiastical revelation that is proper to the secular hierarchies. Insofar as Mongán may be taken to be emblematic of this secular form of prophecy, the earthly paradise described by certain patristic and apocryphal writings seems, in some fashion, to be the proximate origin of the knowledge that is specific to it, and is so due to the awareness, interest and at least periodic involvement that its everliving inhabitants, the gods of the sagas, have in the mortal world.

THE GODS OF THE SAGAS

Now it may seem somewhat odd to be using terms like ‘gods’ and ‘divinities’ here, and likewise to have done so at various points in the preceeding discussion.¹⁴³ But its apparent incongruity will persist only so long as we assume that ‘gods’ is always shorthand for ‘pagan gods’, and, as such, descriptive only of intrinsic rivals to the God of Christian theology,¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Watson (2018a: 200).

¹⁴³ See pp. 8, 10, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Borsje (2009: 65). Cf. also Carey (2012: 40), where he assumes that the plural, ‘gods’, is ‘by definition non-Christian’.

except, perhaps, in its most figurative senses.¹⁴⁵ Granted, in the stories we have been most concerned with here, neither ‘*día*’, nor ‘*dé*’, nor or any other word that could be straightforwardly translated as ‘god’, are used to describe the everliving inhabitants of the earthly paradise.¹⁴⁶ In *Echtrae Chonnlai*, they are described as the ‘people of the hollow hills’ (*áes síde*).¹⁴⁷ In *Immram Brain*, Manannán mac Lír is said to be a ‘man’ (*fér*) of some sort,¹⁴⁸ or at least, ‘in the shape of a man’ (*cruth ind fír*).¹⁴⁹ But given that he is the sort of man who drives about, in a chariot pulled by invisible horses, over sea waves that are, for him, a plain, blooming with flowers,¹⁵⁰ he is clearly not a ‘man’ in any reductive sense of the term, such as would later be argued in *Sanas Cormaic*.¹⁵¹ The same may be said of the ‘woman’ (*ben*) who appears in the midst of Bran’s fortress at the beginning of the *Immram*, and then disappears again, bearing her silver branch with her.¹⁵² Rather, she is a ‘woman’ and Manannán is a ‘man’ in the same way as the otherworld visitor of *Echtrae Chonnlai* is said to be a ‘woman’ (*ben*),¹⁵³ and that of the *Immacaldam* is a ‘youth’ (*óclaig / iuuenis*).¹⁵⁴

One way that some medieval Irish authors made sense of beings of this kind – as beings that are in many ways like humans, but in many ways superior to them – is by interpreting everything that seems wonderous about their persons, their behaviour and their knowledge, as just so many diabolical phantasms.¹⁵⁵ In this view they would either be devils

¹⁴⁵ Williams’s general tendency is to bypass the theological complications introduced by the existence such gods, as they appear in *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immram Brain*, through an exploration of what they might represent allegorically (2016: 54–65, 69). However, he also points to aspects of *Immram Brain* which seem to demand that such gods are understood literally as gods, in addition to whatever allegorical meanings may be at play (2016: 66–8). Nevertheless, he does not attempt to solve the difficulties that seem to be posed by the idea of their literal existence.

¹⁴⁶ As noted by Williams (2016: 63). For the historical development of these terms, see Carey (2012).

¹⁴⁷ See Appendix 3. On *áes síde* as the equivalent of *Tuath(a) Dé (Donann)* see Carey (2006b: 1694).

¹⁴⁸ *Immram Brain* §32; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 17 and trans. 16): ‘Ó robói dá lá ocus dí aidchi forsin muir, conacai a dochum in fer isin charput farsin muir’ (= When he had been at sea two days and two nights, he saw a man in a chariot coming towards him over the sea). This is noted by Williams (2016: 63).

¹⁴⁹ *Immram Brain* §50; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 25 and trans. 24): ‘Sech is Moninnán mac Lir / asin charput cruth ind fír’ (= For it is Moninnán, son of Lir / From the chariot, in the shape of a man).

¹⁵⁰ *Immram Brain* §33–43; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 17–21 and trans. 16–20).

¹⁵¹ *Sanas Cormaic* Y 876; Russell, Arbuthnot and Moran, eds (2006–); Russell, trans. (2008: 37). Other versions of this passage are found in *Sanas Cormaic* B 519, La.82; Russell, Arbuthnot and Moran, eds (2006–).

¹⁵² *Immram Brain* §1–2, 31; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 3–5, 17 and trans. 2–4, 16).

¹⁵³ See Appendix 3.

¹⁵⁴ The *Immacaldam*, lines 1, 3–4, 9, 16, 18, 26; Carey, ed. and trans. (2002: ed. 60 and trans. 61).

¹⁵⁵ The classic examples of this interpretation are the Latin colophon which follows the Leinster recension of the *Táin* and version A of *Serglige Con Culainn* respectively. Bergin, Best and O’Sullivan, eds and trans. (1954–83, vol. ii: 399, lines 12416–20); O’Rahilly (1967: ed. 136 and trans. 172). *Serglige Con Culainn* §41; Carey, ed. and trans. (2011: ed. 36–7 and trans. 37), following Dillon, ed. (1953: 29). While these passages are both significantly later than the texts here in question, ideas which invite such application may be found in the seventh-century Hiberno-Latin text, *De ordine creaturarum*; *De ordine creaturarum* VIII.16; Díaz y Díaz, ed. (1972: 142–4); Smyth, trans. (2011: 186). The reasons for its seventh-century attribution are found in Smyth (2011: 138). For further discussion, see Carey (1994b: 78–9, 83–4; 2006b: 1694; 2011: 16–20; 2015: 51–2); Ó Néill (1999: 272); Borsje (2009: 63–4); Clarke (2014); Williams (2016: 79, 147–8, 150).

themselves,¹⁵⁶ or else, mortal humans who harnessed the power of devils through sorcery.¹⁵⁷ But while the possibility of such an interpretation should always be borne in mind, it is manifestly not commensurable with the perspective of the *Cín Dromma Snechtai* narratives we have been considering. We have seen that they consistently portray these beings as the natural inhabitants and representatives of a paradisaal reality that remains untouched by the stain of sin which has since troubled the descendants of Adam.¹⁵⁸ One might perhaps be tempted to argue, by analogy with the Middle Irish version of *Serglige Con Culainn*, that this happy state of affairs is only apparent, that it is implicitly understood to be just such an deceitful and diabolical phantasm.¹⁵⁹ But the accompanying details rule out the possibility that such an interpretation of these texts could be intrinsic to them. Manannán's prophecy of the advent of Christ would be especially hard to explain as part of a diabolical deception, as would his theologically orthodox description of the Fall and its effects on humanity.¹⁶⁰ The same can be said of the *síd*-woman's prophecy, in *Echtrae Chonnlaí*, in which she foretells the coming of the faith to Ireland, and the Devil's inability to prevent its future destruction of *brichtu druad tárdecho*, the 'spells of the druids of base learning'.¹⁶¹ And whatever the dangers posed by the mysteries known to Mongán, they remain of sufficient interest to Colum Cille that he spends *leth laí nó ó oentráth co 'raile* 'half the day, or from one day to the next' enquiring after them.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ For an example of the interpretation of such gods as devils, in addition to the passage in *Serglige Con Culainn* A referenced immediately above, see *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill*, lines 57–8; Carey (1984: ed. 102 and trans. 106): 'Tuatha Dé 7 Andé dona fes bunadus lasin n-oes n-eólais. Acht ba dóich leo bith din longis dodeochaid de ní dóib' (= the Tuatha Dé and Andé, whose origin the mean of learning do not know; but they are likely some of the exiles who came from heaven). See also the third recension of the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, as found in the Yellow Book of Lecan; *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* V §268; Macalister, ed. and trans. (1938–56, vol. iii: ed. 154 and trans. 155); Koch and Carey *et al*, ed. and trans. (2011: ed. 18–19 and trans. 19).

¹⁵⁷ For an early example of interpretation of the gods as mortal sorcerers, see the first recension of *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* in the Book of Leinster, lines 1049–55; Best, Bergin and O'Sullivan, eds (1954–83, vol. i: 33); Koch *et al*, trans. (2003: 252–3). This corresponds to *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* VII §304–6 [= Carey §64–5]; Macalister, ed. and trans. (1938–56, vol. iv, ed. 106–8 and trans. 107–9).

¹⁵⁸ See pp. 16–21 above.

¹⁵⁹ i.e. that they should be read in the same way that the end of *Serglige Con Culainn* A says that its own description of such things should be read. See reference in note 155 above. Note that it has Lóeg describe the *áes síde* as the descendants of a pre-Fall Adam (*síl n-Ádaim cen imarbos*) before subsequently placing Lóeg's whole experience of them, including their apparently *marthanach* 'everlasting' character, in the category of diabolical phantasm; Dillon, ed. (1953: 19); Gantz, trans. (1981b: 170). Here the apparent influence of *Immram Brain* on its description of the world in which the *áes síde* live is also worth noting; Carey (1994b: 83). Such parallels introduce the possibility that it may have *Immram Brain* in mind as a specific target of its polemic. My thanks to the members of the weekly online meeting of the junior scholars at DIAS during the Covid 19 pandemic for their advice on this point.

¹⁶⁰ *Immram Brain* §46–8; Meyer, ed. and trans. (1895–7: ed. 48 and trans. 46). For the otherworldly woman's prophecy of the Incarnation and the institution of the sacrament of baptism earlier in the same work, see Appendix 6.

¹⁶¹ *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §11; McCone, ed. and trans. (2000a: ed. 122 and trans. 181). See also Carey, ed and trans. (1995b: ed. 56 and trans. 57).

¹⁶² The *Immacaldam*, line 24; Carey, ed. and trans. (2002: ed. 60 and trans. 61).

Of course, since these beings are evidently at home in a place that is either the equivalent of Eden, or Eden itself,¹⁶³ it may well be that they are unfallen humans,¹⁶⁴ rather than belonging to an order of being that is innately superior to human existence in its very essence. But if so, we have seen that Manannán is nevertheless divine enough, in some manner of speaking, that his corporeal fathering of Mongán, can be presented as a lesser analogy of the incorporeal fathering of Christ.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, his son, Mongán, remains the mediator of mysteries that are far beyond what is available to mortals only by means their own capacities.¹⁶⁶ The question of whether the everliving beings met by Connlae, Bran and Colum Cille are understood to be superior to human beings only by virtue of being unaffected by the Fall and its consequences, or superior to human beings by nature (and yet more like humans than angels) is a difficult ambiguity which we will not have occasion to solve here. However, it is not ultimately of great significance to the question of their relative divinity or godhood. What *is* important is the cosmological position that they are found to occupy, whatever the underlying reasons may be for the superiority of their mode of existence by comparison that of mortal humans.

The composite picture which has emerged from our analysis of these accounts is that they are holy beings who suffer few of the constraints from their experience of corporeality and temporality that mortals do in theirs, so that they appear to occupy an intermediate station between the limitation of mortal corporeal humans and the freedom of immortal incorporeal angels. Moreover, they are beings who appear to be (if Mongán is any indication) mediaries of the inspired knowledge that is proper to the secular hierarchies, as from a higher to a lower reality.¹⁶⁷ This all being so, terms like ‘god’ and ‘divinity’ are at least as descriptive of them as they are of, say, the sub-lunary deities of Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* I-II,¹⁶⁸ and those of its Christian interpreters in the twelfth-century.¹⁶⁹ Or in other

¹⁶³ See pp. 16–7 above.

¹⁶⁴ See Carney (1969: 165); Carey (1987; 2006b: 1694; 2011: 29–36; 2015: 52; 2018: 15); Williams (2016: 79, 87). But while it seems clear that this was an important theory, the demonstrable examples of it seem to be somewhat fewer than has been claimed. The idea that the gods, together with the paradise in which they live, have not been touched by Adam’s sin, and generally cannot be seen by those who have, may indicate that they are unfallen humans, but it does not require this conclusion. For discussion of some of the ambiguities here, see Watson (2018b, vol. ii: 403, n.132).

¹⁶⁵ See pp. 9–10.

¹⁶⁶ See pp. 26–8.

¹⁶⁷ The role of the gods as mediators of the secular arts has been a recurring theme in Carey’s work (1987; 1989b: esp. 31; 1991: esp. 174–5; 2006b 1696; 2015: 57). See also Williams (2016: 103–6, 160–74).

¹⁶⁸ See especially, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, I.150–68; Dick, ed., (1925: 64–9); Stahl *et al*, trans. (1977: 51–5).

¹⁶⁹ e.g. Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia: Microcosmos* II.vii.6–12; Weatherbee, ed. and trans. (2015: ed. 122–6 and trans. 123–7). Carey also takes note of this text as a point of comparison to these Early Irish developments (2018: 17–8).

words, where such beings are straightforwardly described as ‘gods’ (*dee*), or ‘god-peoples’ (*tuatha dé*) in later Old Irish texts, this does not, in itself, seem to indicate a rival understanding of what they are, so much as a more explicit and conceptual description of the position which these earlier texts had already implicitly indicated.¹⁷⁰ The identification of them as, in one way or another, the kind of beings that belong to the earthly paradise, does not interfere with the idea of their divinity, or emerge as an alternative to it. Far from it. Insofar as they are understood to be the divine causes of the inspired knowledge that is proper to the secular hierarchies, and likewise, of the potencies associated with that knowledge, it is this development that is the basis of their intelligibility *as* gods in the Christian cosmological system to which they belong.

BACK TO PYTHAGORAS

The character of this inspired secular knowledge and its association with divine beings of this kind are significant matters in themselves, and, as such, deserve a less impressionistic account on another occasion.¹⁷¹ However, for the current discussion, their primary significance is that they return us to the comparison of Early Irish and Pythagorean accounts of reemodiment with which we first began. For in the figure of Mongán we have at last an Early Irish example in which the memory of reemodiments is not only a sign of authority regarding historical knowledge, but also regarding the knowledge of reality itself, as it is in the Pythagorean sources. But while the rumor of Pythagoras’s divine descent from Apollo reflects only that there truly is something divine about his persistently human identity¹⁷² (where any such distinction between divine and human is possible),¹⁷³ Mongán’s mortal human existence is ultimately no more than a transitory manifestation of his divinity, as the son of Mannanán mac Lir. Likewise, the knowledge of which he is the emblematic mediator does not belong to a distinctly human participation in divine life – as does the broadly

¹⁷⁰ i.e. we should probably not be so quick to conclude for example, that *Tochmarc Étaíne*’s portrayal of the *áes síde* as divine causes of the potencies by which the secular hierarchies operate is incommensurable with its portrayal of them as the sinless natural inhabitants of the earthly paradise. Cf. Williams (2016: 87–9). However, insofar as these terms appear to make explicit something that has been implicit in earlier descriptions of the *áes síde*, they are also something more than the terminological equivalents of *áes síde*. Cf. Carey (2006b: 1694).

¹⁷¹ This is currently in preparation.

¹⁷² This holds true even for Iamblichus’s *De vita Pythagorica*, where, of the extant *vitae*, the identification of Pythagoras and Apollo is most fully developed; O’Meara (1989: 35–40). Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* II.3–12; Deubner and Klein, eds (1975: 6–10); Clark, trans. (1989: 25–6).

¹⁷³ Materialist interpretations of Pythagoreanism tend to see divine and animal life as greater and lesser modes of the existence of the soul respectively, not essentially as superior and inferior kinds of beings. See note 19.

philosophical teaching revealed by Pythagoras¹⁷⁴ – but to a form of divine life itself, beyond the human, from which it is received as a providential grace by those for whom it is permitted. In short, so far as the reception of revelatory knowledge is concerned, it is Colum Cille that is the true point comparison with Pythagoras in the *Immacaldam*, not Mongán mac Fiachna. The common symptom of rebirth certainly might tempt one to persist in attempting to draw further parallels between Pythagoras and Mongán beyond it. Yet it remains that rebirth, and thus the knowledge derived from it, belong to the very nature of humanity, in Pythagorean tradition, even if divine help is deemed necessary for its recovery. Whereas, if such things belong to the nature of anything in Early Irish literature,¹⁷⁵ it is to the nature of the everliving gods, the same which have inhabited the earthly paradise from the Creation, and will abide there until the Judgment.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BMMM</i>	<i>Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni</i>
<i>DCD</i>	<i>De Civitate Dei</i>
<i>Immacaldam</i>	<i>Immacaldam Choluim Chille 7 ind Óclaig oc Carraic Eolairg</i>
<i>PL</i>	MIGNE, JACQUES-PAUL (ed.) 1841–55: <i>Patrologia Latina</i> , 217 vols. (Paris).
<i>PG</i>	MIGNE, JACQUES-PAUL (ed.) 1857–66: <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , 161 vols. (Paris).
<i>Scél</i>	<i>Scél asa mberar co mbad hé Find mac Cumail Mongán ocus aní día</i>
<i>Suidigud</i>	<i>fil aided Fothaid Airgidig</i> <i>Suidigud Tellaig Temra</i>

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¹⁷⁴ Emblematic here is the famous attribution to Pythagoras of the Platonic distinction [e.g. *Symposium* 204a] between the human ‘philosophy’ or ‘love of wisdom’ (φιλόσοφία / philosophia) he practiced and the divine ‘wisdom’ (σοφία / sophia) of the gods. For discussion and references, see Riedweg (2005: 90ff.). See also, Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* XII.58; Deubner and Klein, eds (1975: 31–2); Clark, trans. (1989: 23–4).

¹⁷⁵ Michael Clarke gave a paper entitled ‘The bird-man in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*: a new explanation of *énchennach*’, at the 2019 Tionól, on November 16th, where he showed that reembodiment is sometimes presented as belonging, not to the nature of the gods, but to the magical power often attributed to them.

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APPENDICES

1. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, V.v.1

multo tempore perseverabant corpora, in quantum placuit Deo bene habere [...] Quandoquidem Enoch placens Deo in quo placuit corpore translates est, translationem justorum praemonstrans. Et Elias, sicut erat in plasmatis substantia, assumptus est, assumptionem partum prophetans: et nihil impediit eos corpus in translationem et assumptionem eorum [...] dicunt Presbyteri, qui sunt Apostolorum discipuli, eos qui translati sunt illuc translato esse; (justis enim hominibus et Spiritum habentibus praeparatus est paradisos, in quem et Paulus Apostolus asportatus audivit sermones inenarrabiles, quantum ad nos in praesenti) et ibi manere eos qui translati sunt usque ad consummationem, coauspicantes incorruptelam (PG 7, col.1134–5).

‘bodies did continue in existence for a lengthened period, as long as it was God's good pleasure that they should flourish [...] Enoch, when he pleased God, was translated in the same body in which he did please Him, thus pointing out by anticipation the translation of the just. Elijah, too, was caught up *when he was yet* in the substance of the *natural* form; thus exhibiting in prophecy the assumption of those who are spiritual, and that nothing stood in the way of their body being translated and caught up [...] the elders who were disciples of the apostles tell us that those who were translated were transferred to that place [for paradise has been prepared for righteous men, such as have the Spirit; in which place also Paul the apostle, when he was caught up, heard words which are unspeakable as regards us in our present condition], and that there shall they who have been translated remain until the consummation of all things, as a prelude to immortality.’ (Roberts and Rambaut, trans. 1867–92, ix: 65–6).

2. Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, I.iii

Neque enim Enoch et Elias, per tam longam aetatem senectute marcuerunt, nec tamen eos credo iam in illam spiritalem qualitatem corporis commutatos, qualis in resurrectione promittitur, quae in Domino prima praecessit; nisi quia isti fortasse nec his cibis egent, qui sui consumptione reficiunt, sed ex quo translati sunt ita vivunt, ut similem habeant satietatem illis quadraginta diebus, quibus Elias ex calice aquae et ex collyride panis sine cibo vixit; aut, si et his sustentaculis opus est, ita in paradiso fortasse pascuntur sicut Adam, priusquam propter peccatum inde exire meruisset. Habebat enim, quantum existimo, et de lignorum fructibus refectionem contra defectionem, et de ligno vitae stabilitatem contra vetustatem (PL 44, col.111).

‘For Enoch and Elijah were not reduced to the decrepitude of old age by their long life. But yet I do not believe that they were then changed into that spiritual kind of body, such as is promised in the resurrection, and which the Lord was the first to receive; only they probably do not need those aliments, which by their use minister refreshment to the body; but ever since their translation they so live, as to enjoy such a sufficiency as was provided during the

forty days in which Elijah lived on the cruse of water and the cake, without substantial food; or else, if there be any need of such sustenance, they are, it may be, sustained in Paradise in some such way as Adam was, before he brought on himself expulsion therefrom by sinning. And he, as I suppose, was supplied with sustenance against decay from the fruit of the various trees, and from the tree of life with security against old age.’ (Holmes, trans. 1886–9b: 16).

3. *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §3, 9 [= Carey (2011) §1, 9]

‘Dodeochad-sa,’ for in ben, ‘a tírib beó, / áit inna bí bás nó peccad na imorbus / Domelom fleda búana can rithgnom. / Caíncomrac leind cen debaid. / Síid mór i taam: / conid de suidib nonn ainmnigther aés síde [...] [I] n-all suide saides Condla / eter marbu duthainai, / oc idnaidiu éca uathmair. / Totchurethar bíi bithbí. / At gérat do daínib Tethrach, / ardotchiat cach dia / i ndálaib t’athardai, / eter du gnathu inmaini’ (Carey, ed. 2011: 27 and 32)

“‘I come from lands of living folk,’ said the woman, / ‘where there is no death nor sin nor transgression. / We consume everlasting feasts without labour. / There is concord among us without strife. / It is a great *síid* in which we are; / so that because of this we are called *aes síde* [...] Upon a cliff’s edge is Connlae’s seat / among the impermanent dead, / awaiting fearsome death. / Ever-living ones summon you. / You are the darling of the folk of Tethra / who see you every day / among the assemblies of your native place / among the dear folk whom you know”.’ (Carey, trans. 2011: 28 and 32; but see also McCone, ed. and trans. 2000a: 121–2).

4. *Immram Brain* §9–10, 44–5

9. Ní gnáth écoiniud ná mrath / hi mruig dénta etargnath, / ní-bíi nach gargg fri crúais, / acht mad céul m-bind frimben clúais. / 10. Cen brón, cen duba, cen bás, / cen nach n-galar cen indgás [...] 44. Fil dún ó thossuch dúle / cen áiss, cen foirbthe n-úre, / ní-frescam de mbeth anguss, / níntáirill int immorbus. 45. Olc líth dolluid ind nathir / cosin n-athir dia chathir, / sáib sí céni i m-bith ché / co m-bu haithbe nad bue. (Meyer, ed. 1895–7: 7 and 23–5).

9. “‘Unknown is wailing or treachery / In the familiar cultivated land, / There is nothing rough or harsh, / But sweet music striking on the ear. / 10. Without grief, without sorrow, without death, / Without any sickness, without debility [...] 44. We are from the beginning of creation / Without old age, without consummation of earth, / Hence we expect not that there should be frailty, / The sin has not come to us / 45. An evil day when the serpent went / To the father to his city! / She has perverted the times in this world, / So that there came decay which was not original”.’ (Meyer, trans. 1895–7: 6 and 22–4).

5. *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §7-8

7. Do:cachain íarum for suidiu inna mná co-nna:cóle nech guth inna mná 7 co-nna:haccae Connle in mnaí ind úair sin. In tan luide in ben ass re rochetul in druid, do:corastar ubull do Chonnlu. 8. Boí Connle íar sin co cenn mís cen dig cen biad, nabu fiu lesi nach tóare do thomailt acht a ubull. Na nní do:meled, nícon:dígbad ní dend ubull acht ba hóg-som beos.

Gabais éolchaire íarom Connle immun deilb inna mná ad:condairc (McCone, ed., 2000a: 122).

7. ‘Then he intoned over the seat/location of the woman so that no one heard the woman’s voice and so Connlae did not see the woman at that time. When the woman went away [lit. out of it] in response to [lit. before] the druid’s chanting she threw an apple to Conlae. 8. Thereafter Connlae was without drink [and] without food until the end of a month and he did not deem any substance worth eating [lit. any sustenance was not worthwhile with him for consuming] save his apple. [...] Nothing that he at took anything away from the apple but it remained [was still] whole.’ (McCone, trans., 2000a: 159–63).

6. *Immram Brain*, §26–8, 48

26. Ticfa már-gein íar m-bethaib nád-bía for forclethaib, mac mná nad festar céle, gébid flaith na n-ilmíle. 27. Flaith cen tossach cen forcenn, dorúasat bith co forban, isai talam ocus muir, is mairgg bías fua étuil. 28. Is hé dorigni nime, céinmair dia m-ba findchride, glanfid slúagu fua linn glan, is hé ícfes for tedman [...] 48. Ticfa tessarcon úasal ónd rí g dorearúasat, recht find fúglóisfe muire, sech bíd Día, bíd duine (Meyer, ed. 1895–7: 15, 21).

26. “A great birth will come after ages / that will not be in a lofty place, / the son of a woman whose mate will not be known, / He will seize the rule of many thousands. / 27. A rule without beginning, without end, / He has created the whole world so that it is perfect, / Whose are earth and sea / Woe to him who will be under his unwell! / 28. ’Tis He that made the heavens, / Happy he that has a white heart, / He will purify hosts under pure water / ’Tis He that will heal your sicknesses [...] 48. A noble salvation will come / From the King who has created us, / A white law will come over seas, / Besides being God, He will be man”.’ (Meyer, trans., 1895–7: 14, 22).

7. Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae*, V.6ff. [prosa]

Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio, quod ex collatione temporalium clarius liquet [...] Quod igitur temporis patitur condicionem [...] nec coeperit umquam esse nec desinat vitaeque eius cum temporis infinitate tendatur, nondum tamen tale est, ut aeternum esse iure credatur [...] Quod igitur interminabilis vitae plenitudinem totam pariter comprehendit ac possidet, cui neque futuri quicquam absit nec praeteriti fluxerit, id aeternum esse iure perhibetur [...] (Weinberger, ed., 1934: 122ff.)

‘Eternity, then, is the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life; this will be clear from a comparison with creatures that exist in time [...] Whatever, therefore, suffers the condition of being in time, even though it never had any beginning, never has any ending and its life extends into the infinity of time [...] it is not such that may be properly called eternal [...] that which embraces and possesses simultaneously the whole fullness of everlasting life, which lacks nothing of the future and has lost nothing of the past, that is what may properly be said to be called eternal.’ (Watts, trans. (1969: 163–4ff.).

8. *Echtrae Chonnlai* §4, 7

4. ‘Cía ad·gláiter’, ol Conn fria macc, óir ni·acca nech in mnaí acht Conle a óenur [...] 7. Do·cechuin íarum in druí forsin n-guth inna mná cona cóale nech guth inna mná ocus cona·accai Conle in mnaí ind óir sin. In tan lude in ben ass re rochetul in druad, do·corastar ubull do Chonlu (McCone, ed., 2000a: 136, 157–9).

4. “‘Who are you talking to?’ said Conn of the Hundred Battles. No one saw the woman but Connlae alone [...] 7. Then he [the magus/druid] intoned over the seat/location of the woman so that no one heard the woman’s voice and so that Connlae did not see the woman at that time. When the woman went away [lit. out of it] in response to [lit. before] the druid’s chanting she threw an apple to Connlae.’ (McCone, trans., 2000a: 137, 159–60).

9. *The Immacaldam*, lines 22–30

At-raig Colum Cille, oca ndécsin a muintire, leis for leith dia acaldaim 7 dia iarfaigid na rún nemdae 7 talmandae [...] In tain mboíe a muintir oca guidi Choluim Chille ara foillsiged dóib ní don chobrunn, as-bert Colum Cille friu nád coimnacuair cid oenbréthir do epirt do neuch ro ráided fris, ocus as-bert ba móu do les do doínib a nemaisnéis dóib (Carey, ed., 2002: 60)

‘Looking toward his followers, Colum Cille arises and went aside with him, to speak with him and to ask him about the heavenly and earthly mysteries [...] When Colum Cille’s followers were asking him to reveal to them something of the conversation (?), Colum Cille told them that he could not tell them even a single word of anything that he had been told; and he said that it was better for mortals not to be informed of it.’ (Carey, trans., 2002: 61).

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